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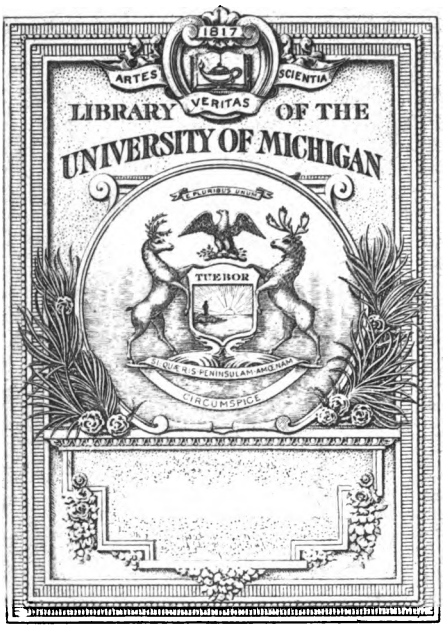

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THE VALLEY OF DECISION

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THE VALLEY OF DECISION

A NOVEL

BY

EDITH WHARTON

VOLUME II

Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision

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BOOK III

THE CHOICE

The Vision touched him on the lips and said:
Hereafter thou shalt eat me in thy bread,
Drink me in all thy kisses, feel my hand
Steal 'twixt thy palm and Joy's, and see me stand
Watchful at every crossing of the ways,
The insatiate lover of thy nights and days.

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BOOK III

THE CHOICE

I

IT was at Naples, some two years later, that the circumstances of his flight were recalled to Odo Valsecca by the sound of a voice which at once mysteriously connected itself with the incidents of that wild night.

He was seated with a party of gentlemen in the saloon of Sir William Hamilton's famous villa of Posilipo, where they were sipping the Ambassador's iced sherbet and examining certain engraved gems and burial-urns recently taken from the excavations. The scene was such as always appealed to Odo's fancy: the spacious room, luxuriously fitted with carpets and curtains in the English style, and opening on a prospect of classical beauty and antique renown; in his hands the rarest specimens of that buried art which, like some belated golden harvest, was now everywhere thrusting itself through the Neapolitan soil; and about him men of taste and understanding, discussing the historic or mythological meaning of the objects before them, and quoting Homer or Horace in corroboration of their guesses.

Several visitors had joined the party since Odo's entrance; and it was from a group of these later arrivals

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that the voice had reached him. He looked round and saw a man of refined and scholarly appearance, dressed *en abbé*, as was the general habit in Rome and Naples, and holding in one hand the celebrated blue vase cut in cameo which Sir William had recently purchased from the Barberini family.

"These reliefs," the stranger was saying, "whether cut in the substance itself, or afterward affixed to the glass, certainly belong to the Grecian period of cameo-work, and recall by the purity of their design the finest carvings of Dioskorides." His beautifully-modulated Italian was tinged by a slight foreign accent, which seemed to connect him still more definitely with the episode his voice recalled. Odo turned to a gentleman at his side and asked the speaker's name.

"That," was the reply, "is the abate de Crucis, a scholar and *cognoscente*, as you perceive, and at present attached to the household of the Papal Nuncio."

Instantly Odo beheld the tumultuous scene in the Duke's apartments, and heard the indictment of Heiligenstern falling in tranquil accents from the very lips which were now, in the same tone, discussing the date of a Greek cameo vase. Even in that moment of disorder he had been struck by the voice and aspect of the agent of the Holy Office, and by a singular distinction that seemed to set the man himself above the coil of passions in which his action was involved. To Odo's

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spontaneous yet reflective temper there was something peculiarly impressive in the kind of detachment which implies, not obtuseness or indifference, but a higher sensitiveness disciplined by choice. Now he felt a renewed pang of regret that such qualities should be found in the service of the opposition; but the feeling was not incompatible with a wish to be more nearly acquainted with their possessor.

The two years elapsing since Odo's departure from Pianura had widened if they had not lifted his outlook. If he had lost something of his early enthusiasm he had exchanged it for a larger experience of cities and men, and for the self-command born of varied intercourse. He had reached a point where he was able to survey his past dispassionately and to disentangle the threads of the intrigue in which he had so nearly lost his footing. The actual circumstances of his escape were still wrapped in mystery: he could only conjecture that the Duchess, foreseeing the course events would take, had planned with Cantapresto to save him in spite of himself. His nocturnal flight down the river had carried him to Ponte di Po, the point where the Piana flows into the Po, the latter river forming for a few miles the southern frontier of the duchy. Here his passport had taken him safely past the customs-officer, and following the indications of the boatman, he had found, outside the miserable village clustered about the customs, a

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travelling-chaise which brought him before the next nightfall to Monte Alloro.

Of the real danger from which this timely retreat had removed him, Gamba's subsequent letters had brought ample proof. It was indeed mainly against Odo that both parties, perhaps jointly, had directed their attack; designing to take him in the toils ostensibly prepared for the Illuminati. His evasion known, the Holy Office had contented itself with imprisoning Heiligenstern in one of the Papal fortresses near the Adriatic, while his mistress, though bred in the Greek confession, was confined in a convent of the *Sepolte Vive* and his Oriental servant sent to the Duke's galleys. As to those suspected of affiliations with the forbidden sect, fines and penances were imposed on a few of the least conspicuous, while the chief offenders, either from motives of policy or thanks to their superior adroitness, were suffered to escape without a reprimand. After this, Gamba's letters reported, the duchy had lapsed into its former state of quiescence. Prince Ferrante had been seriously ailing since the night of the electrical treatment, but the Pope having sent his private physician to Pianura, the boy had rallied under the latter's care. The Duke, as was natural, had suffered an acute relapse of piety, spending his time in expiatory pilgrimages to the various votive churches of the duchy, and declining to transact any public business till he should have com-

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piled with his own hand a calendar of the lives of the saints, with the initial letters painted in miniature, which he designed to present to his Holiness at Easter.

Meanwhile Odo, at Monte Alloro, found himself in surroundings so different from those he had left that it seemed incredible they should exist in the same world. The Duke of Monte Alloro was that rare survival of a stronger age, a cynic. In a period of sentimental optimism, of fervid enthusiasms and tearful philanthropy, he represented the pleasure-loving prince of the Renaissance, crushing his people with taxes but dazzling them with festivities; infuriating them by his disregard of the public welfare, but fascinating them by his good looks, his tolerance of old abuses, his ridicule of the monks, and by the careless libertinage which had founded the fortunes of more than one middle-class husband and father—for the Duke always paid well for what he appropriated. He had grown old in his pleasant sins, and these, as such raiment will, had grown old and dingy with him; but if no longer splendid he was still splendor-loving, and drew to his court the most brilliant adventurers of Italy. Spite of his preference for such company, he had a nobler side, the ruins of a fine but uncultivated intelligence, and a taste for all that was young, generous and high in looks and courage. He was at once drawn to Odo, who instinctively addressed himself to these qualities, and whose conversation and

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manners threw into relief the vulgarity of the old Duke's cronies. The latter was shrewd enough to enjoy the contrast at the expense of his sycophants' vanity; and the cavaliere Valsecca was for a while the reigning favorite. It would have been hard to say whether his patron was most tickled by his zeal for economic reforms or by his faith in the perfectibility of man. Both these articles of Odo's creed drew tears of enjoyment from the old Duke's puffy eyes; and he was never tired of declaring that only his hatred for his nephew of Pianura induced him to accord his protection to so dangerous an enemy of society.

Odo at first fancied that it was in response to a mere whim of the Duke's that he had been despatched to Monte Alloro; but he soon perceived that the invitation had been inspired by Maria Clementina's wish. Some three months after Odo's arrival, Cantapresto suddenly appeared with a packet of letters from the Duchess. Among them her Highness had included a few lines to Odo, whom she briefly adjured not to return to Pianura, but to comply in all things with her uncle's desires. Soon after this the old Duke sent for Odo, and asked him how his present mode of life agreed with his tastes. Odo, who had learned that frankness was the surest way to the Duke's favor, replied that, while nothing could be more agreeable than the circumstances of his sojourn at Monte Alloro, he must own to a wish to travel when the occasion offered.

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"Why, this is as I fancied," replied the Duke, who held in his hand an open letter on which Odo recognized Maria Clementina's seal. "We have always," he continued, "spoken plainly with each other, and I will not conceal from you that it is for your best interests that you should remain away from Pianura for the present. The Duke, as you doubtless divine, is anxious for your return, and her Highness, for that very reason, as urgent that you should prolong your absence. It is notorious that the Duke soon wearies of those about him, and that your best chance of regaining his favor is to keep out of his reach and let your enemies hang themselves in the noose they have prepared for you. For my part, I am always glad to do an ill-turn to that snivelling friar, my nephew, and the more so when I can seriously oblige a friend; and, as you have perhaps guessed, the Duke dares not ask for your return while I show a fancy for your company. But this," added he with an ironical twinkle, "is a tame place for a young man of your missionary temper, and I have a mind to send you on a visit to that arch-tyrant Ferdinand of Naples, in whose dominions a man may yet burn for heresy or be drawn and quartered for poaching on a nobleman's preserves. I am advised that some rare treasures have lately been taken from the excavations there and I should be glad if you would oblige me by acquiring a few for my gallery. I will give you letters to

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a *cognoscente* of my acquaintance, who will put his experience at the disposal of your excellent taste, and the funds at your service will, I hope, enable you to outbid the English brigands who, as the Romans say, would carry off the Colosseum if it were portable."

In all this Odo discerned Maria Clementina's hand, and an instinctive resistance made him hang back upon his patron's proposal. But the only alternative was to return to Pianura; and every letter from Gamba urged on him (for the very reasons the Duke had given) the duty of keeping out of reach as the surest means of saving himself and the cause to which he was pledged. Nothing remained but a graceful acquiescence; and early the next spring he started for Naples.

His first impulse had been to send Cantapresto back to the Duchess. He knew that he owed his escape from grave difficulties to the soprano's prompt action on the night of Heiligenstern's arrest; but he was equally sure that such action might not always be as favorable to his plans. It was plain that Cantapresto was paid to spy on him, and that whenever Odo's intentions clashed with those of his would-be protectors the soprano would side with the latter. But there was something in the air of Monte Alloro which dispelled such considerations, or at least weakened the impulse to act on them. Cantapresto as usual had attracted notice at court. His glibness and versatility amused the Duke, and to Odo he

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was as difficult to put off as a bad habit. He had become so accomplished a servant that he seemed a sixth sense of his master's; and when the latter prepared to start on his travels Cantapresto took his usual seat in the chaise.

To a traveller of Odo's temper there could be few more agreeable journeys than the one on which he was setting out, and the Duke being in no haste to have his commission executed, his messenger had full leisure to enjoy every stage of the way. He profited by this to visit several of the small principalities north of the Apennines before turning toward Genoa, whence he was to take ship for the south. When he left Monte Alloro the land had worn the bleached face of February, and it was amazing to his northern-bred eyes to find himself, on the sea-coast, in the full exuberance of summer. Seated by this halcyon shore, Genoa, in its carved and frescoed splendor, just then celebrating with the customary gorgeous ritual the accession of a new Doge, seemed to Odo like the richly-inlaid frame of some Renaissance "triumph." But the splendid houses with their marble peristyles, and the painted villas in their orange-groves along the shore, housed a dull and narrow-minded society, content to amass wealth and play biribì under the eyes of their ancestral Vandykes,

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without any concern as to the questions agitating the world. A kind of fat commercial dulness, a lack of that personal distinction which justifies magnificence, seemed to Odo the prevailing note of the place; nor was he sorry when his packet set sail for Naples.

Here indeed he found all the vivacity that Genoa lacked. Few cities could at first acquaintance be more engaging to the stranger. Dull and brown as it appeared after the rich tints of Genoa, yet so gloriously did sea and land embrace it, so lavishly the sun gild and the moon silver it, that it seemed steeped in the surrounding hues of nature. And what a nature to eyes subdued to the sober tints of the north! Its spectacular quality—that studied sequence of effects ranging from the translucent outline of Capri and the fantastically blue mountains of the coast, to Vesuvius lifting its torch above the plain—this prodigal response to fancy's claims suggested the boundless invention of some great scenic artist, some Olympian Veronese with sea and sky for a palette. And then the city itself, huddled between bay and mountains, and seething and bubbling like a Titan's caldron! Here was life at its source, not checked, directed, utilized, but gushing forth uncontrollably through every fissure of the brown walls and reeking streets—love and hatred, mirth and folly, impudence and greed, going naked and unashamed as the lazzaroni on the quays. The variegated surface of it all

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was fascinating to Odo. It set free his powers of purely physical enjoyment, keeping all deeper sensations in abeyance. These, however, presently found satisfaction in that other hidden beauty of which city and plain were but the sumptuous drapery. It is hardly too much to say that to the trained eyes of the day the visible Naples hardly existed, so absorbed were they in the perusal of her buried past. The fever of excavation was on every one. No social or political problem could find a hearing while the subject of the last coin or bas-relief from Pompeii or Herculaneum remained undecided. Odo, at first an amused spectator, gradually found himself engrossed in the fierce quarrels raging over the date of an intaglio or the myth represented on an amphora. The intrinsic beauty of the objects, and the light they shed on one of the most brilliant phases of human history, were in fact sufficient to justify the prevailing ardor; and the reconstructive habit he had acquired from Crescenti lent a living interest to the driest discussion between rival collectors.

Gradually other influences reasserted themselves. At the house of Sir William Hamilton, then the centre of the most polished society in Naples, he met not only artists and archæologists, but men of letters and of affairs. Among these, he was peculiarly drawn to the two distinguished economists, the abate Galiani and the cavaliere Filangieri, in whose company he enjoyed

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for the first time sound learning unhampered by pedantry. The lively Galiani proved that social tastes and a broad wit are not incompatible with more serious interests; and Filangieri threw the charm of a graceful personality over any topic he discussed. In the latter indeed, courtly, young and romantic, a thinker whose intellectual acuteness was steeped in moral emotion, Odo beheld the type of the new chivalry, an ideal leader of the campaign against social injustice. Filangieri represented the extremest optimism of the day. His sense of existing abuses was equalled only by his faith in their speedy amendment. Love was to cure all evils: the love of man for man, the effusive all-embracing sympathy of the school of the Vicaire Savoyard, was to purge the emotions by tenderness and pity. In Gamba, the victim of the conditions he denounced, the sense of present hardship prevailed over the faith in future improvement; while Filangieri's social superiority mitigated his view of the evils and magnified the efficacy of the proposed remedies. Odo's days passed agreeably in such intercourse, or in the excitement of excursions to the ruined cities; and as the court and the higher society of Naples offered little to engage him, he gradually restricted himself to the small circle of chosen spirits gathered at the villa Hamilton. To these he fancied the abate de Crucis might prove an interesting addition; and the desire to learn something

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of this problematic person induced him to quit the villa at the moment when the abate took leave.

They found themselves together on the threshold; and Odo, recalling to the other the circumstances of their first meeting, proposed that they should dismiss their carriages and regain the city on foot. De Crucis readily consented; and they were soon descending the hill of Posilipo. Here and there a turn in the road brought them to an open space whence they commanded the bay from Procida to Sorrento, with Capri afloat in liquid gold and the long blue shadow of Vesuvius stretching like a menace toward the city. The spectacle was one of which Odo never wearied; but to-day it barely diverted him from the charms of his companion's talk. The abate de Crucis had that quality of repressed enthusiasm, of an intellectual sensibility tempered by self-possession, which exercises the strongest attraction over a mind not yet master of itself. Though all he said had a personal note he seemed to withhold himself even in the moment of greatest expansion: like some prince who should enrich his favorites from the public treasury but keep his private fortune unimpaired. In the course of their conversation Odo learned that his friend, though of Austrian birth, was of mingled English and Florentine parentage: a fact perhaps explaining the mixture of urbanity and reserve that lent such charm to his manner. He told Odo that his

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connection with the Holy Office had been only temporary, and that, having contracted a severe cold the previous winter in Germany, he had accepted a secretaryship in the service of the Papal Nuncio in order to enjoy the benefits of a mild climate. "By profession," he added, "I am a pedagogue, and shall soon travel to Rome, where I have been called by Prince Bracciano to act as governor to his son; and meanwhile I am taking advantage of my residence here to indulge my taste for antiquarian studies."

He went on to praise the company they had just left, declaring that he knew no better way for a young man to form his mind than by frequenting the society of men of conflicting views and equal capacity. "Nothing," said he, "is more injurious to the growth of character than to be secluded from argument and opposition; as nothing is healthier than to be obliged to find good reasons for one's beliefs on pain of surrendering them."

"But," said Odo, struck with this declaration, "to a man of your cloth there is one belief which never surrenders to reason."

The other smiled. "True," he agreed; "but I often marvel to see how little our opponents know of that belief. The wisest of them seem in the case of those children at our country fairs who gape at the incredible things depicted on the curtains of the booths, without asking themselves whether the reality matches its pre-

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sentment. The weakness of human nature has compelled us to paint the outer curtain of the sanctuary in gaudy colors, and the malicious fancy of our enemies has given a monstrous outline to these pictures; but what are such vanities to one who has passed beyond, and beheld the beauty of the King's daughter, all glorious within?"

As though unwilling to linger on such grave topics, he turned the talk to the scene at their feet, questioning Odo as to the impression Naples had made on him. He listened courteously to the young man's comments on the wretched state of the peasantry, the extravagances of the court and nobility and the judicial corruption which made the lower classes submit to any injustice rather than seek redress through the courts. De Crucis agreed with him in the main, admitting that the monopoly of corn, the maintenance of feudal rights and the King's indifference to the graver duties of his rank placed the kingdom of Naples far below such states as Tuscany or Venetia; "though," he added, "I think our economists, in praising one state at the expense of another, too often overlook those differences of character and climate that must ever make it impossible to govern different races in the same manner. Our peasants have a blunt saying: *Cut off the dog's tail and he is still a dog;* and so I suspect the most enlightened rule would hardly bring this prompt and choleric people, living on a volcanic soil and amid a teeming vegetation, into any

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resemblance with the clear-headed Tuscan or the gentle and dignified Roman."

As he spoke they emerged upon the Chiaia, where at that hour the quality took the air in their carriages, while the lower classes thronged the footway. A more vivacious scene no city of Europe could present. The gilt coaches drawn by six or eight of the lively Neapolitan horses, decked with plumes and artificial flowers and preceded by running footmen who beat the foot-passengers aside with long staves; the richly-dressed ladies seated in this never-ending file of carriages, bejewelled like miraculous images and languidly bowing to their friends; the throngs of citizens and their wives in holiday dress; the sellers of sherbet, ices and pastry bearing their trays and barrels through the crowd with strange cries and the jingling of bells; the friars of every order in their various habits, the street-musicians, the half-naked lazzaroni, cripples and beggars, who fringed the throng like the line of scum edging a fair lake;—this medley of sound and color, which in fact resembled some sudden growth of the fiery soil, was an expressive comment on the abate's words.

"Look," he continued, as he and Odo drew aside to escape the mud from an emblazoned chariot, "at the gold-leaf on the panels of that coach and the gold-lace on the liveries of those lacqueys. Is there any other city in the world where gold is so prodigally used? Where

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the monks gild their relics, the nobility their servants, the apothecaries their pills, the very butchers their mutton? One might fancy their bright sun had set them the example! And how cold and grey all soberer tints must seem to these children of Apollo! Well—so it is with their religion and their daily life. I wager half those naked wretches yonder would rather attend a fine religious service, with abundance of gilt candles, music from gilt organ-pipes, and incense from gilt censers, than eat a good meal or sleep in a decent bed; as they would rather starve under a handsome merry king that has the name of being the best billiard-player in Europe than go full under one of your solemn reforming Austrian Archdukes!"

The words recalled to Odo Crescenti's theory of the influence of character and climate on the course of history; and this subject soon engrossing both speakers, they wandered on, inattentive to their surroundings, till they found themselves in the thickest concourse of the Toledo. Here for a moment the dense crowd hemmed them in; and as they stood observing the humors of the scene, Odo's eye fell on the thick-set figure of a man in doctor's dress, who was being led through the press by two agents of the Inquisition. The sight was too common to have fixed his attention, had he not recognized with a start the irascible red-faced professor who, on his first visit to Vivaldi, had defended the Diluvial

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theory of creation. The sight raised a host of memories from which Odo would gladly have beaten a retreat; but the crowd held him in check and a moment later he saw that the doctor's eyes were fixed on him with an air of recognition. A movement of pity succeeded his first impulse, and turning to de Crucis he exclaimed:—"I see yonder an old acquaintance who seems in an unlucky plight and with whom I should be glad to speak."

The other, following his glance, beckoned to one of the *sbirri*, who made his way through the throng with the alacrity of one summoned by a superior. De Crucis exchanged a few words with him, and then signed to him to return to his charge, who presently vanished in some fresh shifting of the crowd.

"Your friend," said de Crucis, "has been summoned before the Holy Office to answer a charge of heresy preferred by the authorities. He has lately been appointed to the chair of physical sciences in the University here, and has doubtless allowed himself to publish openly views that were better expounded in the closet. His offence, however, appears to be a mild one, and I make no doubt he will be set free in a few days."

This, however, did not satisfy Odo; and he asked de Crucis if there were no way of speaking with the doctor at once.

His companion hesitated. "It can easily be arranged,"

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said he; "but—pardon me, cavaliere—are you well-advised in mixing yourself in such matters?"

"I am well-advised in seeking to serve a friend!" Odo somewhat hotly returned; and de Crucis, with a faint smile of approval, replied quietly: "In that case I will obtain permission for you to visit your friend in the morning."

He was true to his word; and the next forenoon Odo, accompanied by an officer of police, was taken to the prison of the Inquisition. Here he found his old acquaintance seated in a clean commodious room and reading Aristotle's History of Animals, the only volume of his library that he had been permitted to carry with him. He welcomed Odo heartily, and on the latter's enquiring what had brought him to this plight, replied with some dignity that he had been led there in the fulfilment of his duty.

"Some months ago," he continued, "I was summoned hither to profess the natural sciences in the University; a summons I readily accepted, since I hoped, by the study of a volcanic soil, to enlarge my knowledge of the globe's formation. Such in fact was the case, but to my surprise my researches led me to adopt the views I had formerly combated, and I now find myself in the ranks of the Vulcanists, or believers in the secondary origin of the earth: a view you may remember I once opposed with all the zeal of inexperience. Having firmly estab-

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lished every point in my argument according to the Baconian method of investigation, I felt it my duty to enlighten my scholars; and in the course of my last lecture I announced the result of my investigations. I was of course aware of the inevitable result; but the servants of Truth have no choice but to follow where she calls, and many have joyfully traversed stonier places than any I am likely to travel."

Nothing could exceed the respect with which Odo heard this simple confession of faith. It was as though the speaker had unconsciously convicted him of remissness, of cowardice even; so vain and windy his theorizing seemed, judged by the other's deliberate act! Yet placed as he was, what could he do, how advance their common end, but by passively waiting on events? At least, he reflected, he could perform the trivial service of trying to better his friend's case; and this he eagerly offered to attempt. The doctor thanked him, but without any great appearance of emotion: Odo was struck by the change which had transformed a heady and intemperate speaker into a model of philosophic calm. The doctor, indeed, seemed far more concerned for the safety of his library and his cabinet of minerals, than for his own. "Happily," said he, "I am not a man of family, and can therefore sacrifice my liberty with a clear conscience: a fact I am the more thankful for when I recall the moral distress of our poor friend

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Vivaldi, when compelled to desert his post rather than be separated from his daughter."

The name brought the color to Odo's brow, and with an embarrassed air he asked what news the doctor had of their friend.

"Alas," said the other, "the last was of his death, which happened two years since in Pavia. The Sardinian Government had, as you probably know, confiscated his small property on his leaving the state, and I am told he died in great poverty, and in sore anxiety for his daughter's future." He added that these events had taken place before his own departure from Turin, and that since then he had learned nothing of Fulvia's fate, save that she was said to have made her home with an aunt who lived in a town of the Veneto.

Odo listened in silence. The lapse of time, and the absence of any links of association, had dimmed the girl's image in his breast; but at the mere sound of her name it lived again, and he felt her interwoven with his deepest fibres. The picture of her father's death and of her own need filled him with an ineffectual pity, and for a moment he thought of seeking her out; but the other could recall neither the name of the town she had removed to nor that of the relative who had given her a home. To aid the good doctor was a simpler business. The intervention of de Crucis and Odo's own influence sufficed to effect his release, and on the payment

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of a heavy fine (in which Odo privately assisted him) he was reinstated in his chair. The only promise exacted by the Holy Office was that he should in future avoid propounding his own views on questions already decided by Scripture, and to this he readily agreed, since, as he shrewdly remarked to Odo, his opinions were now well known, and any who wished farther instruction had only to apply to him privately.

. . . . . .

The old Duke having invited Odo to return to Monte Alloro with such treasures as he had collected for the ducal galleries, the young man resolved to visit Rome on his way to the north. His acquaintance with de Crucis had grown into something like friendship since their joint effort in behalf of the imprisoned sage, and the abate preparing to set out about the same time, the two agreed to travel together. The road leading from Naples to Rome was at that time one of the worst in Italy, and was besides so ill-provided with inns that there was no inducement to linger on the way. De Crucis, however, succeeded in enlivening even this tedious journey. He was a good linguist and a sound classical scholar, besides having, as he had told Odo, a pronounced taste for antiquarian research. In addition to this, he performed agreeably on the violin, and was well-acquainted with the history of music. His chief distinction, however, lay in the ease with which he wore his accomplish-

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ments, and in a breadth of view that made it possible to discuss with him many subjects distasteful to most men of his cloth. The sceptical or licentious ecclesiastic was common enough; but Odo had never before met a priest who united serious piety with this indulgent temper, or who had learning enough to do justice to the arguments of his opponents.

On his venturing one evening to compliment de Crucis on these qualities, the latter replied with a smile: "Whatever has been lately advanced against the Jesuits, it can hardly be denied that they were good school-masters; and it is to them I owe the talents you have been pleased to admire. Indeed," he continued, quietly fingering his violin, "I was myself bred in the order: a fact I do not often make known in the present heated state of public opinion; but which I never conceal when commended for any quality that I owe to the Society rather than to my own merit."

Surprise for the moment silenced Odo; for though it was known that Italy was full of former Jesuits who had been permitted to remain in the country as secular priests, and even to act as tutors or professors in private families, he had never thought of de Crucis in this connection. The latter, seeing his surprise, went on: "Once a Jesuit, always a Jesuit, I suppose. I at least owe the Society too much not to own my debt when the occasion offers. Nor could I ever see the force of the

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charge so often brought against us: that we sacrifice everything to the glory of the order. For what is the glory of the order? Our own motto has declared it: *Ad majorem Dei gloriam*—who works for the Society works for its Master. If our zeal has been sometimes misdirected, our blood has a thousand times witnessed to its sincerity. In the Indies, in America, in England during the great persecution, and lately on our own unnatural coasts, the Jesuits have died for Christ as joyfully as His first disciples died for Him. Yet these are but a small number in comparison with the countless servants of the order who, laboring in far countries among savage peoples, or surrounded by the heretical enemies of our faith, have died the far bitterer death of moral isolation: setting themselves to their task with the knowledge that their lives were but so much indistinguishable dust to be added to the sum of human effort. What association founded on human interests has ever commanded such devotion? And what merely human authority could count on such unquestioning obedience, not in a mob of poor illiterate monks, but in men chosen for their capacity and trained to the exercise of their highest faculties? Yet there have never lacked such men to serve the order; and as one of our enemies has said—our noblest enemy, the great Pascal—'*Je crois volontiers aux histoires dont les témoins se font égorger.*'"

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He did not again revert to his connection with the Jesuits; but in the farther course of their acquaintance Odo was often struck by the firmness with which he testified to the faith that was in him, without using the jargon of piety, or seeming, by his own attitude, to cast a reflection on that of others. He was indeed master of that worldly science which the Jesuits excelled in imparting, and which, though it might sink to hypocrisy in smaller natures, became, in a finely-tempered spirit, the very flower of Christian courtesy.

Odo had often spoken to de Crucis of the luxurious lives led by many of the monastic orders in Naples. It might be true enough that the monks themselves, and even their abbots, fared on fish and vegetables, and gave their time to charitable and educational work; but it was impossible to visit the famous monastery of San Martino, or that of the Carthusians at Camaldoli, without observing that the anchoret's cell had expanded into a delightful apartment, with bed-chamber, library and private chapel, and his cabbage-plot into a princely garden. De Crucis admitted the truth of the charge, explaining it in part by the character of the Neapolitan people, and by the tendency of the northern traveller to forget that such apparent luxuries as spacious rooms, shady groves and the like are regarded as necessities in a hot climate. He urged, moreover, that the monastic life should not be judged by a few isolated instances;

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and on the way to Rome he proposed that Odo, by way of seeing the other side of the question, should visit the ancient foundation of the Benedictines on Monte Cassino.

The venerable monastery, raised on its height over the busy vale of Garigliano, like some contemplative spirit above the conflicting problems of life, might well be held to represent the nobler side of Christian celibacy. For nearly a thousand years its fortified walls had been the stronghold of the humanities, and generations of students had cherished and added to the treasures of the library. But the Benedictine rule was as famous for good works as for learning, and its comparative abstention from dogmatic controversy and from the mechanical devotions of some of the other orders had drawn to it men of superior mind, who sought in the monastic life the free exercise of the noblest activities rather than a sanctified refuge from action. This was especially true of the monastery of Monte Cassino, whither many scholars had been attracted, and where the fathers had long had the highest name for learning and beneficence. The monastery, moreover, in addition to its charitable and educational work among the poor, maintained a school of theology to which students came from all parts of Italy; and their presence lent an unwonted life to the great labyrinth of courts and cloisters.

The abbot, with whom de Crucis was well-acquainted,

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welcomed the travellers warmly, making them free of the library and the archives, and pressing them to prolong their visit. Under the spell of these influences they lingered on from day to day; and to Odo they were the pleasantest days he had known. To be waked before dawn by the bell ringing for lauds—to rise from the narrow bed in his white-washed cell, and opening his casement look forth over the haze-enveloped valley, the dark hills of the Abruzzi, and the remote gleam of sea touched into being by the sunrise—to hasten through hushed echoing corridors to the church where in a grey resurrection-light the fathers were intoning the solemn office of renewal—this morning ablution of the spirit, so like the bodily plunge into clear cold water, seemed to attune the mind to the fullest enjoyment of what was to llow: the hours of study, the talks with the monks, ıe strolls through cloister or garden, all punctuated by he recurring summons to devotion. Yet for all its lacent significance it remained to him a purely sensuous impression, the vision of a golden leisure: not a solution of life's perplexities, but at best an honorable escape from them.

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II

"TO know Rome is to have assisted at the councils of destiny!"

This cry of a more famous traveller must have struggled for expression in Odo's breast as the great city, the city of cities, laid her irresistible hold upon him. His first impression, as he drove in the clear evening light from the Porta del Popolo to his lodgings in the Via Sistina, was of a prodigious accumulation of architectural effects, a crowding of century on century, all fused in the crucible of the Roman sun, so that each style seemed linked to the other by some subtle affinity of color. Nowhere else, surely, is the traveller's first sight so crowded with surprises, with conflicting challenges to eye and brain. Here, as he passed, was a fragment of the ancient Servian wall, there a new stucco shrine embedded in the bricks of a mediæval palace; on one hand a lofty terrace crowned by a row of mouldering busts, on the other a tower with machicolated parapet, its flanks encrusted with bits of Roman sculpture and the escutcheons of seventeenth-century Popes. Opposite, perhaps, one of Fuga's golden-brown churches, with windy saints blowing out of their niches, overlooked the nereids of a *barocco* fountain, or an old house propped itself like a palsied beggar against a row of Corinthian columns; while everywhere flights of steps

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led up and down to hanging gardens, or under archways, and each turn revealed some distant glimpse of convent-walls on the slope of a vineyard or of red-brown ruins profiled against the dim sea-like reaches of the Campagna.

Afterward, as order was born out of chaos, and he began to thread his way among the centuries, this first vision lost something of its intensity; yet it was always, to the last, through the eye that Rome possessed him. Her life, indeed, as though in obedience to such a setting, was an external, a spectacular business, from the wild animation of the cattle-market in the Forum or the hucksters' traffic among the fountains of the Piazza Navona, to the pompous entertainments in the Cardinals' palaces and the ever-recurring religious ceremonies and processions. Pius VI, in the reaction from Ganganelli's democratic ways, had restored the pomp and ceremonial of the Vatican with the religious discipline of the Holy Office; and never perhaps had Rome been more splendid on the surface or more silent and empty within. Odo, at times, as he moved through some assemblage of cardinals and nobles, had the sensation of walking through a huge reverberating palace, decked out with all the splendors of art but long since abandoned of men. The superficial animation, the taste for music and antiquities, all the dilettantisms of an idle and irresponsible society, seemed to him to shrivel to dust in the

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glare of that great past that lit up every corner of the present.

Through his own connections, and the influence of de Crucis, he saw all that was best not only among the nobility, but in that ecclesiastical life now more than ever predominant in Rome. Here at last he was face to face with the mighty Sphinx, and with the bleaching bones of those who had tried to guess her riddle. Wherever he went those "lost adventurers" walked the streets with him, gliding between the Princes of the Church in the ceremonies of Saint Peter's and the Lateran, or mingling in the company that ascended the state staircase at some Cardinal's levée.

He met indeed many accomplished and amiable ecclesiastics, but it seemed to him that the more thoughtful among them had either acquired their peace of mind at the cost of a certain sensitiveness, or had taken refuge in a study of the past, as the early hermits fled to the desert from the disorders of Antioch and Alexandria. None seemed disposed to face the actual problems of life, and this attitude of caution or indifference had produced a stagnation of thought that contrasted strongly with the animation of Sir William Hamilton's circle in Naples. The result in Odo's case was a reaction toward the pleasures of his age; and of these Rome had but few to offer. He spent some months in the study of the antique, purchasing a few good examples of sculpture for

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the Duke, and then, without great reluctance, set out for Monte Alloro.

Here he found a changed atmosphere. The Duke welcomed him handsomely, and bestowed the highest praise on the rarities he had collected; but for the moment the court was ruled by a new favorite, to whom Odo's coming was obviously unwelcome. This adroit adventurer, whose name was soon to become notorious throughout Europe, had taken the old prince by his darling weaknesses, and Odo, having no mind to share in the excesses of the precious couple, seized the first occasion to set out again on his travels.

His course had now become one of aimless wandering; for prudence still forbade his return to Pianura, and his patron's indifference left him free to come and go as he chose. He had brought from Rome—that *albergo d'ira* —a settled melancholy of spirit, which sought refuge in such distractions as the moment offered. In such a mood change of scene was a necessity, and he resolved to employ the next months in visiting several of the mid-Italian cities. Toward Florence he was specially drawn by the fact that Alfieri now lived there; but, as often happens after such separations, the reunion was a disappointment. Alfieri, indeed, warmly welcomed his friend; but he was engrossed in his dawning passion for the Countess of Albany, and that lady's pitiable situation excluded all other interests from his mind. To Odo, to

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whom the years had brought an increasing detachment, this self-absorption seemed an arrest in growth; for Alfieri's early worship of liberty had not yet found its destined channel of expression, and for the moment his enthusiasms had shrunk to the compass of a romantic adventure. The friends parted after a few weeks of unsatisfying intercourse; and it was under the influence of this final disenchantment that Odo set out for Venice.

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It was the vintage season, and the travellers descended from the Apennines on a landscape diversified by the picturesque incidents of the grape-gathering. On every slope stood some villa with awnings spread, and merry parties were picnicking among the vines or watching the peasants at their work. Cantapresto, who had shown great reluctance at leaving Monte Alloro, where, as he declared, he found himself as snug as an eel in a pasty, was now all eagerness to press forward; and Odo was in the mood to allow any influence to decide his course. He had an invaluable courier in Cantapresto, whose enormous pretensions generally assured his master the best lodgings and the fastest conveyance to be obtained, and who was never happier than when outwitting a rival emissary, or bribing a landlord to serve up on Odo's table the repast ordered in advance for some distinguished traveller. His impatience to reach Venice, which he described as the scene of all conceivable delights, had on

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this occasion tripled his zeal, and they travelled rapidly to Padua, where he had engaged a burchiello for the passage down the Brenta. Here however he found he had been outdone at his own game; for the servant of an English Duke had captured the burchiello and embarked his noble party before Cantapresto reached the wharf. This being the season of the villeggiatura, when the Venetian nobility were exchanging visits on the mainland, every conveyance was in motion and no other boat to be had for a week; while as for the "bucentaur" or public bark, which was just then getting under way, it was already packed to the gunwale with Jews, pedlars and such vermin, and the captain swore by the three thousand relics of Saint Justina that he had no room on board for so much as a hungry flea.

Odo, who had accompanied Cantapresto to the waterside, was listening to these assurances and to the soprano's vain invectives, when a well-dressed young man stepped up to the group. This gentleman, whose accent and dress showed him to be a Frenchman of quality, told Odo that he was come from Vicenza, whither he had gone to engage a company of actors for his friend the Procuratore Brà, who was entertaining a distinguished company at his villa on the Brenta; that he was now returning with his players, and that he would be glad to convey Odo so far on his road to Venice. His friend's seat, he added, was near Oriago, but a few

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miles above Fusina, where a public conveyance might always be found; so that Odo would doubtless be able to proceed the same night to Venice.

This civil offer Odo at once accepted, and the Frenchman thereupon suggested that, as the party was to set out the next day at sunrise, the two should sup together and pass the intervening hours in such diversions as the city offered. They returned to the inn, where the actors were also lodged, and Odo's host having ordered a handsome supper, proposed, with his guest's permission, to invite the leading members of the company to partake of it. He departed on this errand; and great was Odo's wonder, when the door reopened, to discover, among the party it admitted, his old acquaintance of Vercelli, the Count of Castelrovinato. The latter, whose dress and person had been refurbished, and who now wore an air of rakish prosperity, greeted him with evident pleasure, and, while their entertainer was engaged in seating the ladies of the company, gave him a brief account of the situation.

The young French gentleman (whom he named as the Marquis de Cœur-Volant) had come to Italy some months previously on the grand tour, and having fallen a victim to the charms of Venice, had declared that, instead of continuing on his travels, he meant to complete his education in that famous school of pleasure. Being master of his own fortune, he had hired a palace

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on the Grand Canal, had despatched his governor (a simple archæologist) on a mission of exploration to Sicily and Greece, and had devoted himself to an assiduous study of Venetian manners. Among those contributing to his instruction was Mirandolina of Chioggia, who had just completed a successful engagement at the theatre of San Moisè in Venice. Wishing to detain her in the neighborhood, her adorer had prevailed on his friend the Procuratore to give a series of comedies at his villa of Bellocchio and had engaged to provide him with a good company of performers. Miranda was of course selected as *prima amorosa;* and the Marquess, under Castelrovinato's guidance, had then set out to collect the rest of the company. This he had succeeded in doing, and was now returning to Bellocchio, where Miranda was to meet them. Odo was the more diverted at the hazard which had brought him into such company, as the Procuratore Brà was one of the noblemen to whom the old Duke had specially recommended him. On learning this, the Marquess urged him to present his letter of introduction on arriving at Bellocchio, where the Procuratore, who was noted for hospitality to strangers, would doubtless insist on his joining the assembled party. This Odo declined to do; but his curiosity to see Mirandolina made him hope that chance would soon throw him in the Procuratore's way.

Meanwhile supper was succeeded by music and danc-

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ing, and the company broke up only in time to proceed to the landing-place where their barge awaited them. This was a private burchiello of the Procuratore's, with a commodious antechamber for the servants, and a cabin cushioned in damask. Into this agreeable retreat the actresses were packed with all their bags and band-boxes; and their travelling-cloaks being rolled into pillows, they were soon asleep in a huddle of tumbled finery.

Odo and his host preferred to take the air on deck. The sun was rising above the willow-clad banks of the Brenta, and it was pleasant to glide in the clear early light past sleeping gardens and villas, and vineyards where the peasants were already at work. The wind setting from the sea, they travelled slowly and had full leisure to view the succession of splendid seats interspersed with gardens, the thriving villages and the poplar-groves festooned with vines. Cœur-Volant spoke eloquently of the pleasures to be enjoyed in this delightful season of the villeggiatura. "Nowhere," said he, "do people take their pleasures so easily and naturally as in Venice. My countrymen claim a superiority in this art, and it may be they possessed it a generation ago. But what a morose place is France become since philosophy has dethroned enjoyment! If you go on a visit to one of our noblemen's seats, what do you find there, I ask? Cards, comedies, music, the opportunity for an agreeable intrigue in the society of your equals? No—

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but a hostess engaged in suckling and bathing her brats, or in studying chemistry and optics with some dirty school-master, who is given the seat of honor at table and a pavilion in the park to which he may retire when weary of the homage of the great; while as for the host, he is busy discussing education or political economy with his unfortunate guests, if, indeed, he is not dragging them through leagues of mud or dust to inspect his latest experiments in forestry and agriculture, or to hear a pack of snuffling school-children singing hymns to the God of Nature! And what," he continued, "is the result of it all? The peasants are starving, the taxes are increasing, the virtuous landlords are ruining themselves in farming on scientific principles, the trades-people are grumbling because the nobility do not spend their money in Paris, the court is dull, the clergy are furious, the queen mopes, the king is frightened, and the whole French people are yawning themselves to death from Normandy to Provence."

"Yes," said Castelrovinato with his melancholy smile, "the test of success is to have had one's money's worth; but experience, which is dried pleasure, is at best a dusty diet, as we know. Yonder, in a fold of those hills," he added, pointing to the cluster of Euganean mountains just faintly pencilled above the plain, "lies the little fief from which I take my name. Acre by acre,

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tree by tree, it has gone to pay for my experiments, not in agriculture but in pleasure; and whenever I look over at it from Venice and reflect on what each rood of ground or trunk of tree has purchased, I wonder to see my life as bare as ever for all that I have spent on it."

The young Marquess shrugged his shoulders. "And would your life," he exclaimed, "have been a whit less bare had you passed it in your ancestral keep among those windy hills, in the company of swine-herds and charcoal burners, with a milk-maid for your mistress and the village priest for your partner at picquet?"

"Perhaps not," the other agreed. "There is a tale of a man who spent his life in wishing he had lived differently; and when he died he was surrounded by a throng of spectral shapes, each one exactly like the other, who, on his asking what they were, replied: 'We are all the different lives you might have lived.'"

"If you are going to tell ghost-stories," cried Cœur-Volant, "I will call for a bottle of Canary!"

"And I," rejoined the Count good-humoredly, "will try to coax the ladies forth with a song;" and picking up his lute, which always lay within reach, he began to sing in the Venetian dialect:

There's a villa on the Brenta
Where the statues, white as snow,
All along the water-terrace
Perch like sea-gulls in a row.

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There's a garden on the Brenta
Where the fairest ladies meet,
Picking roses from the trellis
For the gallants at their feet.

There's an arbor on the Brenta
Made of yews that screen the light,
Where I kiss my girl at midday
Close as lovers kiss at night.

The players soon emerged at this call and presently the deck resounded with song and laughter. All the company were familiar with the Venetian barcaroles, and Castelrovinato's lute was passed from hand to hand, as one after another, incited by the Marquess's Canary, tried to recall some favorite measure—*La biondina in gondoleta* or *Guarda, che bella luna.*

Meanwhile life was stirring in the villages and gardens, and groups of people were appearing on the terraces overhanging the water. Never had Odo beheld a livelier scene. The pillared houses with their rows of statues and vases, the flights of marble steps descending to the gilded river-gates, where boats bobbed against the landings and boatmen gossiped in the shade of their awnings; the marble trellises hung with grapes, the gardens where parterres of flowers and parti-colored gravel alternated with the dusk of tunnelled yew-walks; the company playing at bowls in the long alleys, or drink-

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ing chocolate in gazebos above the river; the boats darting hither and thither on the stream itself, the travelling-chaises, market-wagons and pannier-asses crowding the causeway along the bank—all were unrolled before him with as little effect of reality as the episodes woven in some gaily-tinted tapestry. Even the peasants in the vineyards seemed as merry and thoughtless as the quality in their gardens. The vintage-time is the holiday of the rural year and the day's work was interspersed with frequent intervals of relaxation. At the villages where the burchiello touched for refreshments, handsome young women in scarlet bodices came on board with baskets of melons, grapes, figs and peaches; and under the trellises on the landings, lads and girls with flowers in their hair were dancing the *monferrina* to the rattle of tambourines or the chant of some wandering ballad-singer. These scenes were so engaging to the comedians that they could not be restrained from going ashore and mingling in the village diversions; and the Marquess, though impatient to rejoin his divinity, was too volatile not to be drawn into the adventure. The whole party accordingly disembarked, and were presently giving an exhibition of their talents to the assembled idlers, the Pantaloon, Harlequin and Doctor enacting a comical intermezzo which Cantapresto had that morning composed for them, while Scaramouch and Columbine joined the dancers, and the rest of the company, seiz-

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ing on a train of donkeys laden with vegetables for the Venetian market, stripped these patient animals of their panniers, and mounting them bareback, started a *Corso* around the village square amid the invectives of the drivers and the applause of the crowd.

Day was declining when the Marquess at last succeeded in driving his flock to their fold, and the moon sent a quiver of brightness across the water as the burchiello touched at the landing of a villa set amid close-massed foliage high above the river. Gardens peopled with statues descended from the portico of the villa to the platform on the water's edge, where a throng of boatmen in the Procuratore's livery hurried forward to receive the Marquess and his companions. The comedians, sobered by the magnificence of their surroundings, followed their leader like awe-struck children. Light and music poured from the long façade overhead, but the lower gardens lay hushed and dark, the air fragrant with unseen flowers, the late moon just burnishing the edges of the laurel-thickets from which, now and again, a nightingale's song gushed in a fountain of sound. Odo, spell-bound, followed the others without a thought of his own share in the adventure. Never before had beauty so ministered to every sense. He felt himself lost in his surroundings, absorbed in the scent and murmur of the night.

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III

ON the upper terrace a dozen lacqueys with wax-lights hastened out to receive the travellers. A laughing group followed, headed by a tall vivacious woman covered with jewels, whom Odo guessed to be the Procuratessa Brà. The Marquess, hastening forward, kissed the lady's hand, and turned to summon the actors, who hung back at the farther end of the terrace. The light from the windows and from the lacqueys' tapers fell full on the motley band, and Odo, roused to the singularity of his position, was about to seek shelter behind the Pantaloon when he heard a cry of recognition, and Mirandolina, darting out of the Procuratessa's circle, fell at that lady's feet with a whispered word.

The Procuratessa at once advanced with a smile of surprise and bade the cavaliere Valsecca welcome. Seeing Odo's embarrassment, she added that his Highness of Monte Alloro had already apprised her of the cavaliere's coming, and that she and her husband had the day before despatched a messenger to Venice to enquire if he were already there and to invite him to the villa. At the same moment a middle-aged man with an air of careless kindly strength emerged from the house and greeted Odo.

"I am happy," said he bowing, "to receive at Bellocchio a member of the princely house of Pianura;

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and your excellency will no doubt be as well-pleased as ourselves that accident enables us to make acquaintance without the formalities of an introduction."

This, then, was the famous Procuratore Brà, whose house had given three Doges to Venice, and who was himself regarded as the most powerful if not the most scrupulous noble of his day. Odo had heard many tales of his singularities, for in a generation of elegant triflers his figure stood out with the ruggedness of a granite boulder in a clipped and gravelled garden. To hereditary wealth and influence he added a love of power seconded by great political sagacity and an inflexible will. If his means were not always above suspicion they at least tended to statesmanlike ends, and in his public capacity he was faithful to the highest interests of the state. Reports differed as to his private use of his authority. He was noted for his lavish way of living, and for a hospitality which distinguished him from the majority of his class, who, however showy in their establishments, seldom received strangers, and entertained each other only on the most ceremonious occasions. The Procuratore kept open house both in Venice and on the Brenta, and in his drawing-rooms the foreign traveller was welcomed as freely as in Paris or London. Here, too, were to be met the wits, musicians and literati whom a traditional *morgue* still excluded from many aristocratic houses. Yet in spite of

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his hospitality (or perhaps because of it) the Procuratore, as Odo knew, was the butt of the very poets he entertained, and the worst-satirized man in Venice. It was his misfortune to be in love with his wife; and this state of mind (in itself sufficiently ridiculous) and the shifts and compromises to which it reduced him, were a source of endless amusement to the humorists. Nor were graver rumors wanting; for it was known that the Procuratore, so proof against other persuasions, was helpless in his wife's hands, and that honest men had been undone and scoundrels exalted at a nod of the beautiful Procuratessa. That lady, as famous in her way as her husband, was noted for quite different qualities; so that, according to one satirist, her hospitality began where his ended, and the Albergo Brà (the nickname their palace went by) was advertised in the lampoons of the day as furnishing both bed and board. In some respects, however, the tastes of the noble couple agreed, both delighting in music, wit, good company, and all the adornments of life; while, with regard to their private conduct, it doubtless suffered by being viewed through the eyes of a narrow and trivial nobility, apt to look with suspicion on any deviation from the customs of their class.

Such was the household in which Odo found himself unexpectedly included. He learned that his hosts were in the act of entertaining the English Duke who had

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captured his burchiello that morning; and having exchanged his travelling-dress for a more suitable toilet he was presently conducted to the private theatre where the company had gathered to witness an improvised performance by Mirandolina and the newly-arrived actors.

The Procuratessa at once beckoned him to the row of gilt arm-chairs where she sat with the noble Duke and several ladies of distinction. The little theatre sparkled with wax-lights reflected in the facets of glass chandeliers and in the jewels of the richly-habited company, and Odo was struck by the refined brilliancy of the scene. Before he had time to look about him the curtains of the stage were drawn back, and Mirandolina flashed into view, daring and radiant as ever, and dressed with an elegance which spoke well for the liberality of her new protector. She was as much at her ease as before the vulgar audience of Vercelli, and spite of the distinguished eyes fixed upon her, her smiles and sallies were pointedly addressed to Odo. This made him the object of the Procuratessa's banter, but had an opposite effect on the Marquess, who fixed him with an irritated eye and fidgeted restlessly in his seat as the performance went on.

When the curtain fell the Procuratessa led the company to the circular saloon which, as in most villas of the Venetian mainland, formed the central point of the house. If Odo had been charmed by the graceful deco-

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rations of the theatre, he was dazzled by the airy splendor of this apartment. Dance-music was pouring from the arched recesses above the doorways, and chandeliers of colored Murano glass diffused a soft brightness over the pilasters of the stuccoed walls, and the floor of inlaid marbles on which couples were rapidly forming for the contra-dance. His eye, however, was soon drawn from these to the ceiling which overarched the dancers with what seemed like an Olympian revel reflected in sunset clouds. Over the gilt balustrade surmounting the cornice lolled the figures of fauns, bacchantes, nereids and tritons, hovered over by a cloud of *amorini* blown like rose-leaves across a rosy sky, while in the centre of the dome Apollo burst in his chariot through the mists of dawn, escorted by a fantastic procession of the human races. These alien subjects of the sun—a fur-clad Laplander, a turbaned figure on a dromedary, a blackamoor and a plumed American Indian—were in turn surrounded by a rout of Mænads and Silenuses, whose flushed advance was checked by the breaking of cool green waves, through which boys wreathed with coral and seaweed disported themselves among shoals of flashing dolphins. It was as though the genius of Pleasure had poured all the riches of his inexhaustible realm on the heads of the revellers below.

The Procuratessa brought Odo to earth by remarking that it was a masterpiece of the divine Tiepolo he

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was admiring. She added that at Bellocchio all formalities were dispensed with, and begged him to observe that, in the rooms opening into the saloon, recreations were provided for every taste. In one of these apartments silver trays were set out with sherbets, cakes and fruit cooled in snow, while in another stood gaming-tables around which the greater number of the company were already gathering for *tresette*. A third room was devoted to music; and hither Mirandolina, who was evidently allowed a familiarity of intercourse not accorded to the other comedians, had withdrawn with the pacified Marquess, and perched on the arm of a high gilt chair was pinching the strings of a guitar and humming the first notes of a boatman's song. . .

After completing the circuit of the rooms Odo stepped out on the terrace, which was now bathed in the whiteness of a soaring moon. The colonnades detached against silver-misted foliage, the gardens spectrally outspread, seemed to enclose him in a magic circle of loveliness which the first ray of daylight must dispel. He wandered on, drawn to the depths of shade on the lower terraces. The hush grew deeper, the murmur of the river more mysterious. A yew-arbor invited him and he seated himself on the bench niched in its inmost dusk. Seen through the black arch of the arbor the moonlight lay like snow on parterres and statues. He thought of Maria Clementina, and of the delight

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she would have felt in such a scene as he had just left. Then the remembrance of Mirandolina's blandishments stole over him, and spite of himself he smiled at the Marquess's discomfiture. Though he was in no humor for an intrigue his fancy was not proof against the romance of his surroundings, and it seemed to him that Miranda's eyes had never been so bright or her smile so full of provocation. No wonder *Frattanto* followed her like a lost soul and the Marquess abandoned Rome and Baalbec to sit at the feet of such a teacher! Had not that light philosopher after all chosen the true way and guessed the Sphinx's riddle? Why should to-day always be jilted for to-morrow, sensation sacrificed to thought?

As he sat revolving these questions the yew-branches seemed to stir, and from some deeper recess of shade a figure stole to his side. He started, but a hand was laid on his lips and he was gently forced back into his seat. Dazzled by the outer moonlight he could just guess the outline of the figure silently pressed against his own. He sat speechless, yielding to the charm of the moment, till suddenly he felt a rapid kiss and the visitor vanished as mysteriously as she had come. He sprang up to follow, but inclination failed with his first step. Let the spell of mystery remain unbroken! He sank down on the seat again, lulled by dreamy musings. . .

When he looked up the moonlight had faded and he

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felt a chill in the air. He walked out on the terrace. The moon hung low and the tree-tops were beginning to tremble. The villa-front was grey, with oblongs of yellow light marking the windows of the ball-room. As he looked up at it, the dance-music ceased and not a sound was heard but the stir of the foliage and the murmur of the river against its banks. Then, from a loggia above the central portico, a woman's clear contralto notes took flight:

Before the yellow dawn is up,
With pomp of shield and shaft,
Drink we of Night's fast-ebbing cup
One last delicious draught.

The shadowy wine of Night is sweet,
With subtle slumbrous fumes
Crushed by the Hours' melodious feet
From bloodless elder-blooms. . .

. . . . . .

The days at Bellocchio passed in a series of festivities. The mornings were spent in drinking chocolate, strolling in the gardens and visiting the fish-ponds, meanders and other wonders of the villa; thence the greater number of guests were soon drawn to the card-tables, from which they rose only to dine; and after an elaborate dinner prepared by a French cook the whole company set out to explore the country or exchange visits with the hosts of the adjoining villas. Each even-

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ing brought some fresh diversion: a comedy or an operetta in the miniature theatre, an *al fresco* banquet on the terrace, or a ball attended by the principal families of the neighborhood. Odo soon contrived to reassure the Marquess as to his designs upon Miranda, and when Cœur-Volant was not at cards the two young men spent much of their time together. The Marquess was never tired of extolling the taste and ingenuity with which the Venetians planned and carried out their recreations. "Nature herself," said he, "seems the accomplice of their merry-making, and in no other surroundings could man's natural craving for diversion find so graceful and poetic an expression."

The scene on which they looked out seemed to confirm his words. It was the last evening of their stay at Bellocchio, and the Procuratessa had planned a musical festival on the river. Festoons of colored lanterns wound from the portico to the water; and opposite the landing lay the Procuratore's Bucentaur, a great barge hung with crimson velvet. In the prow were stationed the comedians, in airy mythological dress, and as the guests stepped on board they were received by Miranda, a rosy Venus who, escorted by Mars and Adonis, recited an ode composed by Cantapresto in the Procuratessa's honor. A banquet was spread in the deck-house, which was hung with silk arras and Venetian mirrors, and, while the guests feasted, dozens of little boats decked

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with lights and filled with musicians flitted about the Bucentaur like a swarm of musical fireflies. . .

. . . . . .

The next day Odo accompanied the Procuratessa to Venice. Had he been a traveller from beyond the Alps he could hardly have been more unprepared for the spectacle that awaited him. In aspect and customs Venice differed almost as much from other Italian cities as from those of the rest of Europe. From the fanciful stone embroidery of her churches and palaces to a hundred small singularities in manners and dress—the full-bottomed wigs and long gowns of the nobles, the black mantles and head-draperies of the ladies, the white masks worn abroad by both sexes, the publicity of social life under the arcades of the Piazza, the extraordinary freedom of intercourse in the *casini*, gaming-rooms and theatres—the city proclaimed, in every detail of life and architecture, her independence of any tradition but her own. This was the more singular as Saint Mark's square had for centuries been the meeting-place of East and West, and the goal of artists, scholars and pleasure-seekers from all parts of the world. Indeed, as Cœur-Volant pointed out, the Venetian customs almost appeared to have been devised for the convenience of strangers. The privilege of going masked at almost all seasons and the enforced uniformity of dress, which in itself provided a kind of incognito, made the place sin-

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gularly favorable to every kind of intrigue and amusement; while the mild temper of the people and the watchfulness of the police prevented the public disorders that such license might have occasioned. These seeming anomalies abounded on every side. From the gaming-table where a tinker might set a ducat against a prince it was but a few steps to the *Broglio*, or arcade under the ducal palace, into which no plebeian might intrude while the nobility walked there. The great ladies, who were subject to strict sumptuary laws, and might not display their jewels or try the new French fashions but on the sly, were yet privileged at all hours to go abroad alone in their gondolas. No society was more haughty and exclusive in its traditions, yet the mask levelled all classes and permitted, during the greater part of the year, an equality of intercourse undreamed of in other cities; while the nobles, though more magnificently housed than in any other capital of Europe, generally sought amusement at the public *casini* or assembly-rooms instead of receiving company in their own palaces. Such were but a few of the contradictions in a city where the theatres were named after the neighboring churches, where there were innumerable religious foundations but scarce an ecclesiastic to be met in company, and where the ladies of the laity dressed like nuns, while the nuns in the aristocratic convents went in gala habits and with uncovered

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heads. No wonder that to the bewildered stranger the Venetians seemed to keep perpetual carnival and Venice herself to be as it were the mere stage of some huge comic interlude.

To Odo the setting was even more astonishing than the performance. Never had he seen pleasure and grace so happily allied, all the arts of life so combined in the single effort after enjoyment. Here was not a mere tendency to linger on the surface, but the essence of superficiality itself; not an ignoring of what lies beneath, but an elimination of it: as though all human experience should be beaten thin and spread out before the eye like some brilliant tenuous plaque of Etruscan gold. And in this science of pleasure—mere jeweller's work though it were—the greatest artists had collaborated, each contributing his page to the philosophy of enjoyment in the form of some radiant allegory flowering from palace wall or ceiling like the enlarged reflection of the life beneath it. Nowhere was the mind arrested by a question or an idea. Thought slunk away like an unmasked guest at the ridotto. Sensation ruled supreme, and each moment was an iridescent bubble fresh-blown from the lips of fancy.

Odo brought to the spectacle the humor best fitted for its enjoyment. His weariness and discouragement sought refuge in the emotional satisfaction of the hour. Here at least the old problem of living had been solved,

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and from the patrician taking the air in his gondola to the gondolier himself, gambling and singing on the water-steps of his master's palace, all seemed equally satisfied with the solution. Now if ever was the time to cry "halt!" to the present, to forget the travelled road and take no thought for the morrow. . .

. . . . . .

The months passed rapidly and agreeably. The Procuratessa was the most amiable of guides, and in her company Odo enjoyed the best that Venice had to offer, from the matchless music of the churches and hospitals to the *petits soupers* in the private *casini* of the nobility; while Cœur-Volant and Castelrovinato introduced him to scenes where even a lady of the Procuratessa's intrepidity might not venture.

Such a life left little time for thoughtful pleasures; nor did Odo find in the society about him any sympathy with his more personal tastes. At first he yielded willingly enough to the pressure of his surroundings, glad to escape from thoughts of the past and speculations about the future; but it was impossible to him to lose his footing in such an element, and at times he felt the lack of such companionship as de Crucis had given him. There was no society in Venice corresponding with the polished circles of Milan or Naples, or with the academic class in such University towns as Padua and Pavia. The few Venetians destined to be remembered among those

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who had contributed to the intellectual advancement of Italy vegetated in obscurity, suffering not so much from religious persecution—for the Inquisition had little power in Venice—as from the incorrigible indifference of a society which ignored all who did not contribute to its amusement. Odo indeed might have sought out these unhonored prophets, but that all the influences about him set the other way, and that he was falling more and more into the habit of running with the tide. Now and then, however, a vague *ennui* drove him to one of the book-shops which, throughout Italy, were the chief meeting-places of students and authors. On one of these occasions the dealer invited him into a private room where he kept some rare volumes, and here Odo was surprised to meet Andreoni, the liberal bookseller of Pianura.

Andreoni at first seemed somewhat disconcerted by the meeting; but presently recovering his confidence, he told Odo that he had been recently banished from Pianura, the cause of his banishment being the publication of a book on taxation that was supposed to reflect on the fiscal system of the duchy. Though he did not name the author, Odo at once suspected Gamba; but on his enquiring if the latter had also been banished, Andreoni merely replied that he had been dismissed from his post, and had left Pianura. The bookseller went on to say that he had come to Venice with the idea of setting up

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his press either there or in Padua, where his wife's family lived. Odo was eager to hear more; but Andreoni courteously declined to wait on him at his lodgings, on the plea that it might harm them both to be seen together. They agreed, however, to meet in San Zaccaria after low mass the next morning, and here Andreoni gave Odo a fuller report of recent events in the duchy.

It appeared that in the incessant see-saw of party influences the Church had once more gained on the liberals. Trescorre was out of favor, the Dominican had begun to show his hand more openly, and the Duke, more than ever apprehensive about his health, was seeking to conciliate heaven by his renewed persecution of the reformers. In the general upheaval even Crescenti had nearly lost his place; and it was rumored that he kept it only through the intervention of the Pope, who had represented to the Duke that the persecution of a scholar already famous throughout Europe would reflect little credit on the Church.

As for Gamba, Andreoni, though unwilling to admit a knowledge of his exact whereabouts, assured Odo that he was well and had not lost courage. At court matters remained much as usual. The Duchess, surrounded by her familiars, had entered on a new phase of mad expenditure, draining the exchequer to indulge her private whims, filling her apartments with mountebanks and players, and borrowing from courtiers and servants to

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keep her creditors from the door. Trescorre was no longer able to check her extravagance, and his influence with the Duke being on the wane, the court was once more the scene of unseemly scandals and disorders.

The only new figure to appear there since Odo's departure was that of the little prince's governor, who had come from Rome a few months previously to superintend the heir's education, which was found to have been grievously neglected under his former masters. This was an ecclesiastic, an ex-Jesuit as some said, but without doubt a man of parts, and apparently of more tolerant views than the other churchmen about the court.

"But," Andreoni added, "your excellency may chance to recall him; for he is the same abate de Crucis who was sent to Pianura by the Holy Office to arrest the German astrologer."

Odo heard him with surprise. He had had no news of de Crucis since their parting in Rome, where, as he supposed, the latter was to remain for some years in the service of Prince Bracciano. Odo was at a loss to conceive how or why the Jesuit had come to Pianura; but, whatever his reasons for being there, it was certain that his influence must make itself felt far beyond the range of his immediate duties. Whether this influence would be exerted for good or ill it was impossible to forecast; but much as Odo admired de Crucis, he could not forget that the Jesuit, by his own avowal, was still

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the servant of the greatest organized opposition to moral and intellectual freedom that the world had ever known. That this opposition was not always actively manifested Odo was well aware. He knew that the Jesuit spirit moved in many directions and that its action was often more beneficial than that of its opponents; but it remained an incalculable element in the composition of human affairs, and one the more to be feared since, in ceasing to have a material existence, it had acquired the dread pervasiveness of an idea.

With the Epiphany the wild carnival-season set in. Nothing could surpass the excesses of this mad time. All classes seemed bitten by the tarantula of mirth, every gondola hid an intrigue, the patrician's tabarro concealed a noble lady, the feminine hood and cloak a young spark bent on mystification, the friar's habit a man of pleasure and the nun's veil a lady of the town. The Piazza swarmed with merry-makers of all degrees. The square itself was taken up by the booths of hucksters, rope-dancers and astrologers, while promenaders in travesty thronged the arcades, and the ladies of the nobility, in their white masks and black zendaletti, surveyed the scene from the windows of the assembly-rooms in the Procuratie, or, threading the crowd on the arms of their gallants, visited the various peep-shows and

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flocked about the rhinoceros exhibited in a great canvas tent on the Piazzetta. The characteristic contrasts of Venetian life seemed to be emphasized by the vagaries of the carnival, and Odo never ceased to be diverted by the sight of a long line of masqueraders in every kind of comic disguise kneeling devoutly before the brilliantly-lit shrine of the Virgin under the arches of the Procuratie, while the friar who led their devotions interrupted his litany whenever the quack on an adjoining platform began to bawl through a tin trumpet the praise of his miraculous pills.

The mounting madness culminated on Giovedì Grasso, the last Thursday before Lent, when the Piazzetta became the scene of ceremonies in which the Doge himself took part. These opened with the decapitation of three bulls: a rite said to commemorate some long-forgotten dispute between the inveterate enemies, Venice and Aquileia. The bulls, preceded by halberdiers and trumpeters, and surrounded by armed attendants, were led in state before the ducal palace, and the executioner, practised in his bloody work, struck off each head with a single stroke of his huge sword. This slaughter was succeeded by pleasanter sights, such as the famous *Vola*, or flight of a boy from the bell-tower of Saint Mark's to a window of the palace, where he presented a nosegay to his Serenity and was caught up again to his airy vaulting-ground. After this ingenious feat came another

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called the "Force of Hercules," given by a band of youths who, building themselves into a kind of pyramid, shifted their postures with inexhaustible agility, while bursts of fireworks wove yellow arches through the midday light. Meanwhile the crowds in the streets fled this way and that as a throng of uproarious young fellows drove before them the bulls that were to be baited in the open squares; and wherever a recessed doorway or the angle of a building afforded shelter from the rout, some posture-maker or ballad-singer had gathered a crowd about his carpet.

Ash Wednesday brought about a dramatic transformation. Every travesty laid aside, every tent and stall swept away, the people again gathered in the Piazza to receive the ashes of penitence on their heads. The churches now became the chief centres of interest. Venice was noted for her sacred music and for the lavish illumination of her favorite shrines and chapels; and few religious spectacles were more impressive than the Forty Hours' devotion in the wealthier churches of the city. All the magic of music, painting and sculpture were combined in the service of religion, and Odo's sense of the dramatic quality of the Catholic rites found gratification in the moving scenes where, amid the imperishable splendors of his own creation, man owned himself but dust. Never before had he been so alive to the symbolism of the penitential season, so awed by the

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beauty and symmetry of that great structure of the Liturgical Year that leads the soul up, step by step, to the awful heights of Calvary. The very carelessness of those about him seemed to deepen the solemnity of the scenes enacted—as though the Church, after all her centuries of dominion, were still, as in those early days, but a voice crying in the wilderness.

The Easter bells ushered in the reign of another spirit. If the carnival folly was spent, the joy of returning life replaced it. After the winter diversions of cards, concerts and theatres, came the excursions to the island-gardens of the lagoon and the evening promenade of the *fresca* on the Grand Canal. Now the palace-windows were hung with awnings, the oleanders in the balconies grew rosy against the sea-worn marble, and yellow snap-dragons blossomed from the crumbling walls. The market-boats brought early fruits and vegetables from the Brenta and roses and gilly-flowers from the Paduan gardens; and when the wind set from shore it carried with it the scent of lime-blossoms and flowering fields. Now also was the season when the great civic and religious processions took place, dyeing the water with sunset hues as they swept from the steps of the Piazzetta to San Giorgio, the Redentore or the Salute. In the fashionable convents the nuns celebrated the festivals of their patron saints with musical and dramatic entertainments to which secular visitors were invited.

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These entertainments were a noted feature of Venetian life, and the subject of much scandalous comment among visitors from beyond the Alps. The nuns of the stricter orders were as closely cloistered as elsewhere; but in the convents of Santa Croce, Santa Chiara, and a few others, mostly filled by the daughters of the nobility, an unusual liberty prevailed. It was known that the inmates had taken the veil for family reasons, and to the indulgent Venetian temper it seemed natural that their seclusion should be made as little irksome as possible. As a rule the privileges accorded to the nuns consisted merely in their being allowed to receive visits in the presence of a lay-sister, and to perform in concerts on the feast-days of the order; but some few convents had a name for far greater license, and it was a common thing for the noble libertine returned from Italy to boast of his intrigue with a Venetian nun.

Odo, in the Procuratessa's train, had of course visited many of the principal convents. Whether it were owing to the malicious pleasure of contrasting their own state with that of their cloistered sisters, or to the discreet shelter which the parlor afforded to their private intrigues, the Venetian ladies were exceedingly partial to these visits. The Procuratessa was no exception to the rule, and as was natural to one of her complexion, she preferred the convents where the greatest freedom prevailed. Odo, however, had hitherto found little to tempt

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him in these glimpses of forbidden fruit. The nuns, though often young and pretty, had the insipidity of women secluded from the passions and sorrows of life without being raised above them; and he preferred the frank coarseness of the Procuratessa's circle to the simpering graces of the cloister.

Even Cœur-Volant's mysterious boast of a conquest he had made among the sisters failed to excite his friend's curiosity. The Marquess, though still devoted to Miranda, was too much the child of his race not to seek variety in his emotions; indeed he often declared that the one fault of the Italian character was its unimaginative fidelity in love-affairs.

"Does a man," he asked, "dine off one dish at a *gourmet's* banquet? And why should I restrict myself to one course at the most richly-spread table in Europe? One must love at least two women to appreciate either; and, did the silly creatures but know it, a rival becomes them like a patch."

Sister Mary of the Crucifix, he went on to explain, possessed the very qualities that Miranda lacked. The daughter of a rich nobleman of Treviso, she was skilled in music, drawing and all the operations of the needle, and was early promised in marriage to a young man whose estates adjoined her father's. The jealousy of a younger sister, who was secretly in love with the suitor, caused her to accuse Cœur-Volant's mistress of miscon-

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duct and thus broke off the marriage; and the unhappy girl, repudiated by her bridegroom, was at once despatched to a convent in Venice. Enraged at her fate, she had repeatedly appealed to the authorities to release her; but her father's wealth and influence prevailed against all her efforts. The Abbess, however, felt such pity for her that she was allowed more freedom than the other nuns, with whom her wit and beauty made her a favorite in spite of her exceptional privileges. These, as Cœur-Volant hinted, included the liberty of leaving the convent after nightfall to visit her friends; and he professed to be one of those whom she had thus honored. Always eager to have his good taste ratified by the envy of his friends, he was urgent with Odo to make the lady's acquaintance; and it was agreed that, on the first favorable occasion, a meeting should take place at Cœur-Volant's casino.

The weeks elapsed, however, without Odo's hearing farther of the matter, and it had nearly passed from his mind when one August day he received word that the Marquess hoped for his company that evening. He was in that mood of careless acquiescence when any novelty invites, and the heavy warmth of the summer night seemed the accomplice of his humor. Cloaked and masked, he stepped into his gondola and was swept rapidly along the Grand Canal and through winding channels to the Giudecca. It was close on midnight and

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all Venice was abroad. Gondolas laden with musicians and hung with colored paper lamps lay beneath the palace windows or drifted out on the oily reaches of the lagoon. There was no moon, and the side-canals were dark and noiseless but for the hundreds of caged nightingales that made every byway musical. As his prow slipped past garden walls and under the blackness of low-arched bridges Odo felt the fathomless mystery of the Venetian night: not the open night of the lagoons, but the secret dusk of nameless water-ways between blind windows and complaisant gates.

At one of these his gondola presently touched. The gate was cautiously unbarred and Odo found himself in a strip of garden preceding a low pavilion in which not a light was visible. A woman-servant led him indoors and the Marquess greeted him on the threshold.

"You are late!" he exclaimed. "I began to fear you would not be here to receive our guests with me."

"Your guests?" Odo repeated. "I had fancied there was but one."

The Marquess smiled. "My dear Mary of the Crucifix," he said, "is too well-born to venture out alone at this late hour, and has prevailed on her bosom friend to accompany her.—Besides," he added with his deprecating shrug, "I own I have had too recent an experience of your success to trust you alone with my enchantress; and she has promised to bring the most

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fascinating nun in the convent to protect her from your wiles."

As he spoke he led Odo into a room furnished in the luxurious style of a French boudoir. A Savonnerie carpet covered the floor, the lounges and easy-chairs were heaped with cushions, and the panels hung with pastel drawings of a lively or sentimental character. The windows toward the garden were close-shuttered, but those on the farther side of the room stood open on a starlit terrace whence the eye looked out over the lagoon to the outer line of islands.

"Confess," cried Cœur-Volant, pointing to a table set with delicacies and flanked by silver wine-coolers, "that I have spared no pains to do my goddess honor and that this interior must present an agreeable contrast to the whitewashed cells and dismal refectory of her convent! No passion," he continued, with his quaint didactic air, "is so susceptible as love to the influence of its surroundings; and principles which might have held out against a horse-hair sofa and *soupe à l'oignon* have before now been known to succumb to silk cushions and champagne."

He received with perfect good-humor the retort that if he failed in his designs his cook and his upholsterer would not be to blame; and the young men were still engaged in such banter when the servant returned to say that a gondola was at the water-gate. The Mar-

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quess hastened out and presently reappeared with two masked and hooded figures. The first of these, whom he led by the hand, entered with the air of one not unaccustomed to her surroundings; but the other hung back, and on the Marquess's inviting them to unmask, hurriedly signed to her friend to refuse.

"Very well, fair strangers," said Cœur-Volant with a laugh; "if you insist on prolonging our suspense we shall avenge ourselves by prolonging yours, and neither my friend nor I will unmask till you are pleased to set us the example."

The first lady echoed his laugh. "Shall I own," she cried, "that I suspect in this unflattering compliance a pretext to conceal your friend's features from me as long as possible? For my part," she continued, throwing back her hood, "the mask of hypocrisy I am compelled to wear in the convent makes me hate every form of disguise, and with all my defects I prefer to be known as I am." And with that she detached her mask and dropped the cloak from her shoulders.

The gesture revealed a beauty of the laughing sensuous type best suited to such surroundings. Sister Mary of the Crucifix, in her sumptuous gown of shot-silk, with pearls wound through her reddish hair and hanging on her bare shoulders, might have stepped from some festal canvas of Bonifazio's. She had laid aside even the light gauze veil worn by the nuns in gala

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habit, and no vestige of her calling showed itself in dress or bearing.

"Do you accept my challenge, cavaliere?" she exclaimed, turning on Odo a glance confident of victory.

The Marquess meanwhile had approached the other nun with the intention of inducing her to unmask; but as Sister Mary of the Crucifix advanced to perform the same service for his friend, his irrepressible jealousy made him step hastily between them.

"Come, cavaliere," he cried, gaily drawing Odo toward the unknown nun, "since you have induced one of our fair guests to unmask perhaps you may be equally successful with the other, who appears provokingly indifferent to my advances."

The masked nun had in fact retreated to a corner of the room and stood there, drawing her cloak about her, rather in the attitude of a frightened child than in that of a lady bent on a gallant adventure.

Sister Mary of the Crucifix approached her playfully. "My dear Sister Veronica," said she, throwing her arm about the other's neck, "hesitates to reveal charms which she knows must cast mine in the shade; but I am not to be outdone in generosity, and if the Marquess will unmask his friend I will do the same by mine."

As she spoke she deftly pinioned the nun's hands and snatched off her mask with a malicious laugh. The Marquess, entering into her humor, removed Odo's at the

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same instant, and the latter, turning with a laugh, found himself face to face with Fulvia Vivaldi. He grew white, and Mary of the Crucifix sprang forward to support her friend.

"Good God! What is this?" gasped the Marquess, staring from one to the other.

A glance of entreaty from Fulvia checked the answer on Odo's lips, and for a moment there was silence in the room; then Fulvia, breaking away from her companion, fled out on the terrace. Sister Mary was about to follow; but Odo, controlling himself, stepped between them.

"Madam," said he in a low voice, "I recognize in your companion a friend of whom I have long had no word. Will you pardon me if I speak with her alone?"

Sister Mary drew back with a meaning sparkle in her handsome eyes. "Why, this," she cried, not without a touch of resentment, "is the prettiest ending imaginable; but what a sly creature, to be sure, to make me think it was her first assignation!"

Odo, without answering, hastened out on the terrace. It was so dark after the brightly-lit room that for a moment he did not distinguish the figure which had sprung to the low parapet above the water; and he stumbled forward just in time to snatch Fulvia back to safety.

"This is madness!" he cried, as she hung upon him trembling.

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"The boat," she stammered in a strange sobbing voice—"the boat should be somewhere below—"

"The boat lies at the water-gate on the other side," he answered.

She drew away from him with a gesture of despair. The struggle with Sister Mary had disordered her hair and it fell on her white neck in loosened strands. "My cloak—my mask—" she faltered vaguely, clasping her hands across her bosom; then suddenly dropped to a seat and burst into tears. Once before—but in how different a case!—he had seen her thus bowed with weeping. Then fate had thrown him humbled at her feet, now it was she who cried him mercy in every line of her bent head and shaken breast; and the thought of that other meeting thrilled his heart with pity.

He knelt before her, seeking her hands. "Fulvia, why do you shrink from me?" he whispered. But she shook her head and wept on.

At last her sobs subsided and she rose to her feet. "I must go back," she said in a low tone, and would have passed him.

"Back? To the convent?"

"To the convent," she said after him; but she made no farther effort to move.

The question that tortured him sprang forth. "You have taken the vows?"

"A month since," she answered.

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He hid his face in his hands and for a moment both were silent. "And you have no other word for me—none?" he faltered at last.

She fixed him with a hard bright stare. "Yes—one," she cried; "keep a place for me among your gallant recollections."

"Fulvia!" he said with sudden strength, and caught her by the arm.

"Let me pass!" she cried.

"No, by heaven!" he retorted; "not till you listen to me—till you tell me how it is I come upon you here! Ah, child," he broke out, "do you fancy I don't see how little you belong in such scenes? That I don't know you are here through some dreadful error? Fulvia," he pleaded, "will you never trust me?" And at the word he burned with blushes in the darkness.

His voice, perhaps, rather than what he said, seemed to have struck a yielding fibre. He felt her arm tremble in his hold; but after a moment she said with cruel distinctness: "There was no error. I came knowingly. It was the company and not the place I was deceived in."

Odo drew back with a start; then, as if in spite of himself, he broke into a laugh. "By the saints," said he, almost joyously, "I am sorry to be where I am not wanted; but, since no better company offers, will you not make the best of mine and suffer me to hand you

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in to supper with our friends?" And with a low bow he offered her his arm.

The effect was instantaneous. He saw her catch at the balustrade for support.

"*Sancta simplicitas!*" he exulted, "and did you think to play the part at such short notice?" He fell at her feet and covered her hands with kisses. "My Fulvia! My poor child! Come with me, come away from here," he entreated. "I know not what mad hazard has brought us thus together, but I thank God on my knees for the encounter. You shall tell me all or nothing, as you please—you shall presently dismiss me at your convent-gate, and never see me again if you so will it—but till then, I swear, you are in my charge, and no human power shall come between us!"

As he ended, the Marquess's voice called gaily through the open window: "Friends, the burgundy is uncorked! Will you not join us in a glass of good French wine?"

Instantly Fulvia flung herself upon Odo. "Yes—yes; away—take me away from here!" she cried clinging to him. She had gathered her cloak about her and drawn the hood over her disordered hair. "Away! Away!" she repeated. "I cannot see them again. Good God, is there no other way out?"

With a gesture he warned her to be silent and drew her along the terrace in the shadow of the house. The gravel creaked beneath their feet, and she shook at the

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least sound; but her hand lay in his like a child's and he felt himself her master.

At the farther end of the terrace a flight of steps led to a narrow strip of shore. He helped her down and after listening a moment gave a whistle. Presently they heard the low plash of oars and saw the prow of a gondola cautiously rounding the angle of the terrace. The water was shallow and the boatmen proceeded slowly and at length paused a few yards from the land.

"We can come no nearer," one of them called; "what is it?"

"Your mistress is unwell and wishes to return," Odo answered; and catching Fulvia in his arms he waded out with her to the gondola and lifted her over the side. "To Santa Chiara!" he ordered, as he laid her on the cushions beneath the *felze;* and the boatmen, recognizing her as one of their late fares, without more ado began to row rapidly toward the city.

IV

IN the pitying darkness of the gondola she lay beyond speech, her hand in his, her breath coming fitfully. Odo waited in suspense, not daring to question her, yet sure that if she did not speak then she would never do so. All doubt and perplexity of spirit had vanished in the simple sense of her nearness. The throb

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of her hand in his was like the heart-beat of hope. He felt himself no longer a drifting spectator of life but a sharer in its gifts and renunciations. Which this meeting would bring he dared not yet surmise: it was enough that he was with Fulvia and that love had freed his spirit.

At length she began to speak. Her agitation was so great that he had difficulty in piecing together the fragments of her story; but for the moment he was more concerned in regaining her confidence than in seeking to obtain a clear picture of the past. Before she could end, the gondola rounded the corner of the narrow canal skirting the garden-wall of Santa Chiara. Alarmed lest he should lose her again he passionately urged her to receive him on the morrow; and after some hesitation she consented. A moment later their prow touched the postern and the boatman gave a low call which proved him no novice at the business. Fulvia signed to Odo not to speak or move; and they sat listening intently for the opening of the gate. As soon as it was unbarred she sprang ashore and vanished in the darkness of the garden; and with a cold sense of failure Odo heard the bolt slipping back and the stealthy fall of the oars as the gondola slid away under the shadow of the convent-wall. Whither was he being carried and would that bolt ever be drawn for him again? In the sultry dawn the convent loomed forbiddingly as a prison, and

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he could hardly believe that a few hours earlier the very doors now closed against him had stood open to all the world. They would open again; but whether to him, who could conjecture? He was resolved to see Fulvia again, but he shrank from the thought of forcing himself upon her. She had promised to receive him; but what revulsion of feeling might not the morrow bring?

Unable to sleep, he bade the boatmen carry him to the Lido. The sun was just rising above the Friulian Alps and the lagoon lay dull and smooth as a breathed-on mirror. As he paced the lonely sands he tried to reconstruct Fulvia's broken story, supplementing it with such details as his experience of Venetian life suggested. It appeared that after her father's death she had found herself possessed of a small sum of money which he had painfully accumulated for her during the two years they had spent in Pavia. Her only thought was to employ this inheritance in publishing the great work on the origin of civilization which Vivaldi had completed a few days before his last seizure. Through one of the professors of the University, who had been her father's friend, she negotiated with a printer of Amsterdam for the production of the book, and the terms being agreed on, despatched the money and the manuscript thither by a sure hand. Both were duly delivered and the publisher had advanced so far in his work as to send Fulvia the proof-sheets of the first chapters, when he took

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alarm at the renewed activity of the Holy Office in France and Italy, declared there would be no market for the book in the present state of affairs, and refused either to continue printing it, or to restore the money, which he said had barely covered the setting-up of the type. Fulvia then attempted to recover the manuscript; but the publisher refusing to surrender it, she found herself doubly beggared at a stroke.

In this extremity she turned to a sister of her father's, who lived near Treviso; and this excellent woman, though persuaded that her brother's heretical views had doomed him to everlasting torment, did not scruple to offer his child a home. Here Fulvia had lived for two years when her aunt's sudden death left her destitute; for the good lady, to atone for having given shelter to a niece of doubtful orthodoxy, had left the whole of her small property to the Church.

Fulvia's only other relations were certain distant cousins of her mother's, members of the Venetian nobility, but of the indigent class called Barnabotti, who lived on the bounty of the state. While in Treviso she had made the acquaintance of one of these cousins, a stirring noisy fellow involved in all the political agitations of the state. It was among the Barnabotti, the class most indebted to the government, that these seditious movements generally arose; and Fulvia's cousin was one of the most notorious malcontents of his order.

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She had mistaken his revolutionary bluster for philosophic enlightenment; and, persuaded that he shared in her views, she rashly appealed to him for help. With the most eloquent expressions of sympathy he offered her a home under his own roof; but on reaching Venice she was but ill-received by his wife and family, who made no scruple of declaring that, being but pensioners themselves, they were in no state to nourish their pauper relatives. Fulvia could not but own that they were right; for they lived in the garret of a half-ruined house, pawning their very beds to pay for ices in the Piazza, and sitting at home all the week in dirty shifts and nightcaps that they might go to mass in silk and powder on a Sunday.

After two months of wretchedness with these unfriendly hosts, whom she vainly tried to conciliate by a hundred little services and attentions, the poor girl resolved to return to Milan, where she hoped to obtain some menial position in the household of one of her father's friends. Her cousins, at this, made a great outcry, protesting that none of their blood should so demean herself, and that they would spare no efforts to find some better way of providing for her. Their noble connections gave Fulvia the hope that they might obtain a small pension for her, and she unsuspiciously yielded to their wishes; but to her dismay she learned, a few weeks later, that, thanks to their exertions, she

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was to be admitted as a novice to the convent of Santa Chiara. Though it was the common way of disposing of portionless girls, the liberal views of her cousins had reassured Fulvia, and she woke to her fate too late to escape it. She was to enter on her novitiate on the morrow; but even had delay been possible she knew that both the civil and religious authorities would uphold her family in their course.

Her cousins, knowing her independent spirit, and perhaps fearing an outcry if they sequestered her too closely, had thought to soften her resistance by placing her in a convent noted for its leniencies; but to Fulvia such surroundings were more repugnant than the strictest monastic discipline. The corruption of the religious orders was a favorite topic with her father's friends, and the Venetian nuns were noted throughout Italy for their frivolous and dissipated lives; but nothing that Fulvia had heard or imagined approached the realities that awaited her. At first the mere sense of imprisonment, of being cut off forever from the world of free thought and action which had been her native element, overwhelmed every other feeling, and she lay numb in the clutch of fate. But she was too young for this merciful torpor to last, and with the returning consciousness of her situation came the instinctive effort to amend it. How she longed then to have been buried in some strict order, where she might have spent her

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days in solitary work and meditation! How she loathed the petty gossip of the nuns, their furtive reaching after forbidden pleasures! The blindest bigotry would have been less insufferable than this clandestine commerce with the world, the strictest sequestration than this open parody of the monastic calling. She sought in vain among her companions for an answering mind. Many, like herself, were in open rebellion against their lot; but for reasons so different that the feeling was an added estrangement. At last the longing to escape overmastered every other sensation. It became a fixed idea, a devouring passion. She did not trust herself to think of what must follow, but centred every faculty on the effort of evasion.

At this point in her story her growing distress had made it hard for Odo to gather more than a general hint of her meaning. It was clear, however, that she had found her sole hope of escape lay in gaining the friendship of one of the more favored nuns. Her own position in the community was of the humblest, for she had neither rank nor wealth to commend her; but her skill on the harpsichord had attracted the notice of the music-mistress and she had been enrolled in the convent orchestra before her novitiate was over. This had brought her into contact with a few of the more favored sisters, and among them she had recognized in Sister Mary of the Crucifix the daughter of the nobleman who

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had been her aunt's landlord at Treviso. Fulvia's name was not unknown to the handsome nun, and the coincidence was enough to draw them together in a community where such trivial affinities must replace the ties of nature. Fulvia soon learned that Mary of the Crucifix was the spoiled darling of the convent. Her beauty and spirit, as much perhaps as her family connections, had given her this predominance; and no scruples interfered with her use of it. Finding herself, as she declared, on the wrong side of the grate, she determined to gather in all the pleasures she could reach through it; and her reach was certainly prodigious. Here Odo had been obliged to fall back on his knowledge of Venetian customs to conjecture the incidents leading up to the scene of the previous night. He divined that Fulvia, maddened by having had to pronounce the irrevocable vows, had resolved to fly at all hazards; that Sister Mary, unconscious of her designs, had proposed to take her on a party of pleasure, and that the rash girl, blind to every risk but that of delay, had seized on this desperate means of escape. What must have followed had she not chanced on Odo, she had clearly neither the courage nor the experience to picture; but she seemed to have had some confused idea of throwing herself on the mercy of the foreign nobleman she believed she was to meet.

So much Odo had gathered; and her voice, her ges-

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ture, the disorder of her spirit, supplied what her words omitted. Not for a moment, either in listening to her or in the soberer period of revision, did he question the exact truth of her narrative. It was the second time that they had met under strange circumstances; yet now as before the sense of her candor was his ruling thought. He concluded that, whatever plight she found herself in, she would be its immediate justification; and felt sure he must have reached this conclusion though love had not had a stake in the verdict. This perhaps but proved him the more deeply taken; for it is when passion tightens the net that reason flaps her wings most loudly.

Day was high when he returned to his lodgings, impatient for a word from Fulvia. None had come; and as the hours passed he yielded to the most disheartening fancies. His wretchedness was increased by the thought that he had once inflicted on her such suspense he was now enduring; and he went so far as to wonder if this were her revenge for Vercelli. But if the past was intolerable to consider the future was all baffling fears. His immediate study was how to see her; and this her continued silence seemed to refuse him. The extremity of her plight was his best ally; yet here again anxiety suggested that his having been the witness of her humiliation must insensibly turn her against him. Never perhaps does a man show less knowledge of human nature

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than in speculating on the conduct of his beloved; and every step in the labyrinth of his conjectures carried Odo farther from the truth. This rose on him at nightfall, in the shape of a letter slipped in his hand by a lay-sister as he crossed the square before his lodgings. He stepped to the light of the nearest shrine and read the few words in a tumult. "This being Friday, no visitors are admitted to the convent; but I entreat you to come to me to-morrow an hour before benediction." A postscript added: "It is the hour when visitors are most frequent."

He saw her meaning in a flash: his best chance of speaking with her was in a crowd, and his heart bounded at the significance of her admission. Now indeed he felt himself lord of the future. Nothing counted but that he was to see her. His horizon was narrowed to the bars through which her hand would greet him; yet never had the world appeared so vast.

Long before the hour appointed he was at the gate of Santa Chiara. He asked to speak with Sister Veronica and the portress led him to the parlor. Several nuns were already behind the grate, chatting with a group of fashionable ladies and their gallants; but Fulvia was not among them. In a few moments the portress returned and informed Odo that Sister Veronica was indisposed and unable to leave her cell. His heart sank, and he asked if she had sent no message. The portress answered

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in the negative, but added that the Abbess begged him to come to her parlor; and at this his hopes took wing again.

The Abbess's parlor was preceded by a handsome antechamber, where Odo was bidden to wait. It was doubtless the Reverend Mother's hour for receiving company, for through the door beyond he heard laughter and music and the sound of lively talk. Presently this door opened and Mary of the Crucifix entered. In her monastic habit she looked coarse and overblown: the severe lines and sober tints of the dress did not become her. Odo felt an insurmountable repugnance at seeing her. He could not conceive why Fulvia had chosen such an intermediary, and for the first time a stealing doubt tainted his thoughts of her.

Sister Mary seemed to read his mind. "You bear me a grudge," said she gaily; "but I think you will live to own that I do not return it. Come with me if you wish to speak with Sister Veronica."

Odo flushed with surprise. "She is not too unwell to receive me?"

Sister Mary raised her eyebrows in astonishment. "To receive her cousin? Her nearest male relative, come from Treviso purposely to visit her? The saints forbid!" she cried. "The poor child is indeed dying—but only to see her cousin!" And with that she seized his hand and hurried him down the corridor to a door on which she

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tapped three times. It opened at once, and catching Odo by the shoulder she pushed him laughingly over the threshold and cried out as she vanished: "Be careful not to agitate the sufferer!"

Odo found himself in a neat plain cell; but he had no eyes for his surroundings. All that he saw was Fulvia, dressed in her nun's habit and seated near the window, through which the afternoon light fell softly on her white coif and the austere folds of her dress. She rose and greeted him with a smile.

"You are not ill, then?" he cried, stupidly, and the color rose to her pale face.

"No," she said, "I am not ill, and at first I was reluctant to make use of such a subterfuge; but to feign an indisposition was the only way of speaking with you privately, and, alas, in this school one soon becomes a proficient in deceit." She paused a moment and then added with an effort: "Even this favor I could not have obtained save through Sister Mary of the Crucifix; but she now understands that you are an old friend of my father's, and that my motive for wishing to see you is not what she at first supposed."

This was said with such noble simplicity and so direct a glance, that Odo, confused by the sense of his own doubts, could only murmur as he bent over her hand: "*Fuoco di quest' incendio non v' assale.*"

She drew back gently and signed him to a seat. "I

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trust not," she said, answering his citation; "but I think the flame through which Beatrice walked must have been less contaminating than this morass in which I flounder."

She was silent a moment and he had leisure to steal a closer look at her. It was the first time since their meeting that he had really seen her face; and he was struck by the touch of awe that had come upon her beauty. Perhaps her recent suffering had spiritualized a countenance already pure and lofty; for as he looked at her it seemed to him that she was transformed into a being beyond earthly contact, and his heart sank with the sense of her remoteness. Presently she began to speak and his consciousness of the distance between them was increased by the composure of her manner. All signs of confusion and distress had vanished. She faced him with the same innocent freedom as under her father's roof, and all that had since passed between them seemed to have slipped from her without a trace.

She began by thanking him for coming, and then at once reverted to her desperate situation and to her determination to escape.

"I am alone and friendless," she said, "and though the length of our past acquaintance" (and here indeed she blushed) "scarce warrants such a presumption, yet I believe that in my father's name I may appeal to you. It may be that with the best will to help me you can

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discover no way of doing so, but at least I shall have the benefit of your advice. I now see," she added, again deeply blushing, but keeping her eyes on his, "the madness of my late attempt, and the depth of the abyss from which you rescued me. Death were indeed preferable to such chances; but I do not mean to die while life holds out a hope of liberation."

As she spoke there flashed on Odo the reason of her remoteness and composure. He had come to her as a lover: she received him as a friend. His longing to aid her was inspired by passion: she saw in it only the natural impulse of benevolence. So mortifying was the discovery that he hardly followed her words. All his thoughts were engaged in reviewing the past; and he now saw that if, as she said, their acquaintance scarce warranted her appealing to him as a friend, it still less justified his addressing her as a lover. Only once before had he spoken to her of love, and that under circumstances which almost forbade a return to the subject, or at least compelled an added prudence in approaching it. Once again he found himself the prisoner of his folly, and stood aghast at the ingenuity of the punishment. To play the part she ascribed to him was his only portion; and he resolved at least to play it like a man.

With what composure he might he assured Fulvia of his desire to serve her, and asked if she had no hope of obtaining her release from the Holy See. She an-

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swered: None, since enquiry must reveal that she was the daughter of a man who had been prosecuted for heresy, and that after his death she had devoted the small sum he had left her to the publication of his writings. She added that his Holiness, resolved to counteract the effects of the late Pope's leniency, had greatly enlarged the powers of the Inquisition, and had taken special measures to prevent those who entered the religious life from renouncing their calling.

"Since I have been here," she said, "three nuns have tried to obtain their release, and one has conclusively proved that she was forced to take the vows by fraud; but their pleas have been rejected, and mine would meet the same fate. Indeed, the only result would be to deprive me of what little liberty I am allowed; for the three nuns I speak of are now the most closely watched in the convent."

She went on to explain that, thanks to the connivance of Sister Mary of the Crucifix, her actual escape might be effected without much difficulty; but that she was now awake to the madness of taking so desperate a step without knowing whither it would lead her.

"To be safe," she said, "I must cross the borders of Switzerland. If I could reach Geneva I should be beyond the arm of the Holy Office, and at the University there I should find friends of my father's who would surely take pity on my situation and help me to a liv-

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ing. But the journey is long and difficult, and not to be safely attempted without some assurance of shelter on the way."

It was on Odo's lips to declare that he would provide her with shelter and escort; but at this moment three warning taps announced the return of Sister Mary of the Crucifix.

She entered merrily and at once laid one hand on Fulvia's brow and caught her wrist in the other. "The patient's pulse has risen," she declared, "and rest and a lowering treatment are essential. I must ask the cavaliere to withdraw."

Fulvia, with an air of constraint, held out her hand to Odo.

"I shall see you soon again?" he whispered; and Sister Mary, as though she had guessed his words, cried out, "I think your excellency may count on a recurrence of the seizure two days hence at the same hour!"

V

WITH this Odo was forced to be content; and he passed the intervening time in devising the means of Fulvia's rescue. He was resolved to let no rashness or negligence hinder the attempt, and to prove, by the discretion of his course, that he was no longer the light fool who had once hazarded her safety.

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He went about his preparations as one that had no private stake in the venture; but he was therefore the more punctilious to show himself worthy of her trust and sensible of the charge it laid upon him.

At their next meeting he found her in the same open and friendly mood, and she listened gratefully as he set forth his plan. This was that she should first write to a doctor of the University in Geneva, who had been her father's friend, stating her plight and asking if he could help her to a living should she contrive to reach Geneva. Pending the reply, Odo was to plan the stages of the journey in such fashion that she might count on concealment in case of pursuit; and she was not to attempt her escape till these details were decided. Fulvia was the more ready to acquiesce in this postponement as she did not wish to involve Sister Mary in her adventure, but hoped to escape unassisted during an entertainment which was to take place in the convent on the feast of Saint Michael, some six weeks later.

To Odo the delay was still more welcome; for it gave him what he must needs regard as his last opportunity of being in the girl's company. She had accepted his companionship on the journey with a readiness in which he saw only the magnanimity of pardon; but in Geneva they must part, and what hope had he of seeing her again? The first smart of vanity allayed, he was glad she chose to treat him as a friend. It was in this char-

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acter that he could best prove his disinterestedness, his resolve to make amends for the past; and in this character only—as he now felt—would it be possible for him to part from her.

On his second visit he ventured to discharge his mind of its heaviest burden by enquiring what had befallen her and her father after he had lost trace of them at Vercelli. She told him quite simply that, failing to meet him at the appointed place, they at once guessed that his plan had been winded by the abate who travelled with him; and that after a few hours' delay her father had succeeded in securing a chaise which had taken them safely across the border. She went on to speak of the hardships they had suffered after reaching Milan. Even under a comparatively liberal government it was small advantage to be marked by the Holy Office; and though he received much kindness, and even material aid, from those of his way of thinking, Vivaldi was unable to obtain the professorship he had hoped for.

From Milan they went to Pavia; but in this University, the most liberal in Italy, the chairs were so sought after that there was no hope of his receiving a charge worthy of his talents. Here, however, his spirit breathed its natural air, and reluctant to lose the privileges of such intercourse he decided to accept the post of librarian to an eccentric nobleman of the town. If

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his pay was modest his duties left him leisure for the work which was his chief concern; for his patron, who had houses in Milan and Brescia, came seldom to Pavia, and Fulvia and her father had the vast palace to themselves. They lodged in a corner adjoining the library, spending their days in studious seclusion, their evenings in conversation with some of the first scholars of Europe: the learned botanist Scopoli, Spallanzani, Volta, and Father Fontana, the famous mathematician. In such surroundings Vivaldi might have pursued his task contentedly enough, but for the thought of Fulvia's future. This, his daughter said, continually preyed on him, driving him to labors beyond his strength; for he hoped by the publication of his book to make good, at least in part, the loss of the small property which the Sardinian government had confiscated. All her entreaties could not dissuade him from over-exertion; and in addition to his regular duties he took on himself (as she afterward learned) the tedious work of revising proofs and copying manuscripts for the professors. This drudgery, combined with severe intellectual effort, exceeded his flagging powers; and the book was hardly completed when his patron, apprised of its contents, abruptly removed him from his post. From that day Vivaldi sank in health; but he ended as became a sage, content to have discharged the task for which he had given up home and substance, and dying with

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the great Stoic's words upon his lips:—*Lex non pœna mors.*

Vivaldi's friends in Milan came generously to Fulvia's aid, and she would gladly have remained among them; but after the loss of her small inheritance and of her father's manuscript she was without means of repaying their kindness, and nothing remained but to turn to her own kin.

As Odo sat in the quiet cell, listening to her story, and hearing again the great names his youth had reverenced, he felt himself an exile returning to his own, remounting the familiar heights and breathing the air that was his birthright. Looking back from this recovered standpoint he saw how far behind his early hopes had been left. Since his departure from Naples there had been nothing to remind him of that vast noiseless labor of the spirit going on everywhere beneath the social surface: that baffled but undiscouraged endeavor in which he had once so impatiently claimed his share. Now every word of Fulvia's smote the bones of some dead purpose, till his bosom seemed a very valley of Ezekiel. Her own trials had fanned her love of freedom, and the near hope of release lent an exaltation to her words. Of bitterness, of resentment she gave no sign; and he was awed by the same serenity of spirit which had struck him in the imprisoned doctor. But perhaps the strongest impression she produced was that of increas-

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ing his points of contact with life. His other sentimental ties had been a barrier between himself and the outer world; but the feeling which drew him to Fulvia had the effect of levelling the bounds of egoism, of letting into the circle of his nearest emotions that great tide of human longing and effort that had always faintly sounded on the shores of self. Perhaps it was her power of evoking this wider life that gave a sense of permanence, of security almost, to the stolen moments of their intercourse, lulling the lover's impatience of actual conditions with the sense of something that must survive the accidents of fortune. Only in some such way could he explain, in looking back, the completeness of each moment spent with her. He was conscious even at the time of a suspension of the emotional laws, a charmed surrender to the limitations of his fate. When he was away his impatience reasserted itself; but her presence was like a soothing hand on his spirit, and he knew that his quiet hours with her would count among those intervals between the crises of life that flower in memory when the crises themselves have faded.

It was natural that in the course of these visits she in turn should question him; and as his past rearranged itself beneath her scrutiny he seemed once more to trace the thread of purpose on which its fragments hung. He told her of his connection with the liberals of Pianura, of the situation at court, and of the reason for his pro-

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longed travels. As he talked her eyes conveyed the exquisite sense of her complete comprehension. She saw, before he could justify himself, how the uncertainty of his future, and his inability to act, had cast him adrift upon a life of superficial enjoyment; and how his latent dissatisfaction with this life had inevitably resulted in self-distrust and vacillation. "You wait your hour," she said of him; and he seized on the phrase as a justification of his inactivity and, when chance should offer, a spur to fresh endeavor. Her interest in the liberal cause had been intensified and exalted by her father's death —his martyrdom, as she described it. Like most women possessed of an abstract idea she had unconsciously personified the idea and made a religion of it; but it was a religion of charity and not of vindictiveness. "I should like my father's death avenged by love and not by hate," she said; "I would have it bring peace, not a sword."

On one point only she remained, if not hostile, yet unresponsive. This was when he spoke of de Crucis. Her manner hardened instantly, and he perceived that, though he dwelt on the Jesuit's tolerant view and cultivated tastes, she beheld only the priest and not the man. She had been eager to hear of Crescenti, whom she knew by name as a student of European repute, and to the praise of whose parochial charities she listened with outspoken sympathy; but the Jesuits

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stood for the Holy Office, and she had suffered too deeply at the hands of the Holy Office to regard with an open mind any who might be supposed to represent its principles. It was impossible for Odo to make her understand how distinctly, in de Crucis's case, the man predominated over the order; and conscious of the painfulness of the subject, he gave up the attempt to interest her in his friend.

Three or four times he was permitted to visit her in her cell: after that they met almost daily in the parlor, where, about the hour of benediction, they could talk almost as privately under cover of the general chatter. In due time Fulvia received an answer from the Calvinist professor, who assured her of a welcome in Geneva and shelter under his roof. Odo, meanwhile, had perfected the plan of their journey; but as Michaelmas approached he began to fear Cantapresto's observation. He now bitterly regretted that he had not held to his purpose of sending the soprano back to Pianura; but to do so at this point would be to challenge observation, and he resolved instead on despatching him to Monte Alloro with a letter to the old Duke. As the way to Geneva lay in the opposite direction this would at least give the fugitives a three days' lead; and they had little cause to fear pursuit from any other quarter. The convent indeed might raise a hue and cry; but the nuns of Santa Chiara had lately given the devout so much

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cause for scandal that the Abbess would probably be disposed to hush up any fresh delinquency. The time too was well-chosen; for the sisters had prevailed on the Reverend Mother to celebrate the saint's day by a masked ball, and the whole convent was engrossed in the invention of whimsical disguises. The nuns indeed were not to take part in the ball; but a number of them were to appear in an allegorical entertainment with which the evening was to open. The new Papal Nuncio, who was lately arrived in Venice, had promised to be present; and as he was known to be a man of pleasure there was scarce a sister in the convent but had an eye to his conquest. These circumstances gave to Fulvia's plans the shelter of indifference; for in the delightful effort of surpassing the other nuns even Mary of the Crucifix lost interest in her friend's affairs.

Odo, to preserve the secrecy of his designs, had been obliged to keep up a pretence of his former habits, showing himself abroad with Cœur-Volant and Castelrovinato and frequenting the Procuratessa's routs and card-parties. This lady, though lately returned to the Brenta, had announced her intention of coming to Venice for the ball at Santa Chiara; and Cœur-Volant was mightily preoccupied with the entertainment, at which he purposed his mistress should outshine all her companions.

The evening came at last, and Odo found himself

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entering the gates of Santa Chiara with a throng of merry-makers. The convent was noted for its splendid hospitality, and unwonted preparations had been made to honor the saint. The brightly-illuminated bridge leading to the square of Santa Chiara was decked with a colonnade of pasteboard and stiffened linen cunningly painted, and a classical portico masked the entrance gate. A flourish of trumpets and hautboys and the firing of miniature cannon greeted the arrival of the guests, who were escorted to the parlor, which was hung with tapestries and glowing with lights like a Lady Chapel. Here they were received by the Abbess, who, on the arrival of the Nuncio, led the way to the garden, where a stage had been erected.

The nuns who were not to take part in the play had been seated directly under the stage, divided from the rest of the company by a low screen of foliage. Ranged beneath the footlights, which shone on their bare shoulders and white gowns, and on the gauze veils replacing their monastic coifs, they seemed a choir of pagan virgins grouped in the proscenium of an antique theatre. Everything indeed combined to produce the impression of some classic festival: the setting of motionless foliage, the mild autumnal sky in which the stars hung near and vivid, and the foreground thronged with a motley company lit by the shifting brightness of torches.

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As Odo, in mask and travesty, stood observing the fantastically-dressed audience, the pasteboard theatre adorned with statuary, and the nuns flitting across the stage, his imagination, strung to the highest pitch by his own impending venture, was thrilled by the contrast between the outward appearance of the scene and its underlying reality. From where he stood he looked directly at the Abbess, who was seated with the Nuncio and his suite under the tall crucifix in the centre of the garden. As if to emphasize the irony of the situation, the torch fixed behind this noble group cast an enlarged shadow of the cross over the Abbess's white gown and the splendid robes of her companions, who, though they wore the mask, had not laid aside their clerical dress. To Odo the juxtaposition had the effect of some supernatural warning, the shadow of the divine wrath projected on its heedless ministers; an impression heightened by the fact that, just opposite the cross, a lively figure of Pan, surmounting the pediment of the theatre, seemed to fling defiance at the Galilean intruder.

The nuns, like the rest of the company, were masked; and it had been agreed between Odo and Fulvia that the latter should wear a wreath of myrtle above her veil. As almost all her companions had chosen brightly-colored flowers this dark green chaplet was easily distinguished among the clustered heads beneath the stage, and Odo had no doubt of being able to rejoin Fulvia

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in the moment of dispersal that should follow the conclusion of the play. He knew that the sisters were to precede their guests and be locked behind the grate before the ball began; but as they passed through the garden and cloisters the barrier between nuns and visitors would probably not be too strictly maintained. As he had foreseen, the company, attracted by the graceful procession, pressed forward regardless of the assistant mistresses' protests, and the shadowy arcades were full of laughter and whispered snatches of talk as the white flock was driven back to its fold.

Odo had withdrawn to the darkest angle of the cloister, close to a door leading to the pharmacy. It was here that Fulvia had told him to wait; and though he had lost sight of her when the audience rose, he stood confidently watching for the reappearance of the myrtle-wreath. Presently he saw it close at hand; and just then the line of sisters flowed toward him, driven forward by a group of lively masqueraders, among whom he seemed to recognize Cœur-Volant's voice and figure. Nothing could have been more opportune, for the pressure swept the wearer of the myrtle-wreath almost into his arms; and as the intruders were dispersed and the nuns laughingly reformed their lines, her hand lingered in his and he felt himself drawn toward the door.

It yielded to her touch and Odo followed her down a dark passage-way to the empty room where rows of

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old Faenza jars and quaintly-shaped flagons glimmered in the dusk. Beyond the pharmacy was another door, the key of which hung on the wall with the portress's hood and cloak. Without a word the girl wrapped herself in the cloak and, fitting the key to the lock, softly opened the door. All this was done with a rapidity and assurance for which Odo was unprepared; but, reflecting that Fulvia's whole future hung on the promptness with which each detail of her plan was executed, he concluded that her natural force of character had enabled her to assume an ease she could hardly feel.

The door opened on the kitchen-garden, and brushing the lavender-hedges with her flying skirts she sped on ahead of Odo to the postern which the nuns were accustomed to use for their nocturnal escapades. Only the thickness of an oaken gate stood between Fulvia and the outer world. To her the opening of the gate meant the first step toward freedom, but to Odo the passing from their enchanted weeks of fellowship to the inner loneliness of his former life. He hung back silent while she drew the bolt.

A moment later they had crossed the threshold and his gondola was slipping toward them out of the shadow of the wall. Fulvia sprang on board and he followed her under the *felze*. The warm darkness enclosing them stirred impulses which their daily intercourse had subdued, and in the sense of her nearness he lost sight of

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the conditions which had brought them together. The feeling seemed to communicate itself; for as the gondola rounded the angle of the convent-wall and swung out on the open, she drooped toward him with the turn of the boat and their lips met under the loosened masks.

At the same instant the light of the Virgin's shrine in the corner of the convent-wall fell through the window of the *felze* on the face lifted to Odo's; and he found himself suddenly confronted by the tender eyes and malicious smile of Sister Mary of the Crucifix.

"By Diana," she cried as he started back, "I did but claim my pay in advance; nor do I think that, when she knows all, Sister Veronica will grudge me my reward!"

He continued to stare at her in speechless bewilderment, and she went on with a kind of tender impatience: "You simpleton, can you not guess that you were watched, and that but for me your Veronica would at this moment be lying under lock and key in her cell? Instead of which," she continued, speaking more slowly, and leaning back as though to enjoy the full savor of his suspense, "instead of which she now awaits you in a safe nook of my choosing, where, within half an hour's time, you may atone to her with interest for the trifling infidelity into which I have betrayed you."

"She knows, then?" Odo faltered, not daring to say

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more in his ignorance of Sister Mary's share in the secret.

Sister Mary shook her head with a tantalizing laugh. "That you are coming? Alas, no, poor angel! She fancies that she has been sent from the convent to avoid you—as indeed she was, and by the Reverend Mother's own order, who, it seems, had wind of the intrigue this morning. But, the saints be praised, the excellent sister who was ordered to attend her is in my pay, and instead of conducting her to her relatives of San Barnabò, who were to keep her locked up over night, has, if I mistake not, taken her to a good woman of my acquaintance—an old servant, in fact—who will guard her as jealously as the family plate till you and I come to her release."

As she spoke she put out her head and gave a whispered order to the gondolier; and at the word the boat swung round and headed for the city.

In the violent reaction which this strange encounter produced, Odo was for the moment incapable of taking any clear note of his surroundings. Uncertain if he were not once more the victim of some such mischance as seemed to attend all his efforts to succor Fulvia, he sat in silent apprehension as the gondola shot across the Grand Canal and entered the labyrinth of water-ways behind San Moisè. Sister Mary took his silence philosophically.

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"You dare not speak to me, for fear of betraying yourself," she said, "and I scarce wonder at your distrust; for your plans were so well laid that I had no notion of what was on foot, and must have remained in ignorance if Veronica had not been put in Sister Martha's charge. But you will both live to thank me, and I hope," she added, laughing, "to own that you would have done better to take me into your confidence from the first."

As she spoke the gondola touched at the head of a narrow passage which lost itself in the blackness of the overhanging houses. Sister Mary sprang out and drew Odo after her. A few yards down the alley she entered a plain low-storied house somewhat withdrawn behind its neighbors. Followed by Odo she groped her way up a dark flight of stairs and knocked at a door on the upper landing. A vague flutter within, indicative of whispers and uncertain movements, was followed by the slipping of the bolt, and a middle-aged woman looked out. She drew back with an exclamation of welcome, and Sister Mary, seizing Odo by the shoulders, pushed him across the threshold of a small dimly-lit kitchen.

Fulvia, in her nun's habit, cowered in the darkest corner; but at sight of Odo she sprang up, and ran toward him with a happy cry.

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VI

AN hour later the two were well on their way toward Mestre, where a travelling-chaise awaited them. Odo, having learned that Andreoni was settled in Padua, had asked him to receive Fulvia in his house till the next nightfall; and the bookseller, whom he had taken into his confidence, was eager to welcome the daughter of the revered Vivaldi.

The extremes of hope and apprehension had left Fulvia too exhausted for many words, and Odo, after she had confirmed every particular of Sister Mary's story, refrained from questioning her farther. Thanks to her friend's resources she had been able to exchange her nun's dress for the plain gown and travelling-cloak of a young woman of the middle class; and this dress painfully recalled to Odo the day when he had found her standing beside the broken-down chaise on the road to Vercelli.

The recollection was not calculated to put him at his ease; and indeed it was only now that he began to feel the peculiar constraint of his position. To Andreoni his explanation of Fulvia's flight had seemed natural enough; but on the subsequent stages of their journey she must pass for his mistress or his wife, and he hardly knew in what spirit she would take the misapprehensions that must inevitably arise.

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At Mestre their carriage waited, and they drove rapidly toward Padua through the waning night. Andreoni, in his concern for Fulvia's safety, had prepared for her reception a little farm-house of his wife's, in a vineyard beyond the town; and here at daybreak it was almost a relief to Odo to commit his charge to the Signora Andreoni's care.

The day was spent indoors, and Andreoni having thought it more prudent to bring no servant from Padua, his wife prepared the meals for their guests and the bookseller drew a jar of his own wine from the cellar. Fulvia kept to herself during the day; but at dusk she surprised Odo by entering the room with a trayful of plates and glasses, and helping their hostess to set out the supper-table. The few hours of rest had restored to her not only the serenity of the convent, but a lightness of step and glance that Odo had not seen in her since the early days of their friendship. He marvelled to see how the first breath of freedom had set her blood in motion and fanned her languid eye; but he could not suppress the accompanying thought that his own presence had failed to work such miracles.

They had planned to ride that night to a little village in the hills beyond Vicenza, where Fulvia's foster-mother, a peasant of the Vicentine, lived with her son, who was a vine-dresser; and supper was hardly over when they were told that their horses waited. Their

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kind hosts dared not urge them to linger; and after a hurried farewell they rode forth into the fresh darkness of the September night.

The new moon was down and they had to thread their way slowly through the stony lanes between the vineyards. At length they gained the open country, and growing more accustomed to the darkness put their horses to a trot. The change of pace, and the exhilaration of traversing an unknown country in the hush and mystery of night, combined to free their spirits, and Odo began to be aware that the barrier between them was lifted. To the charm of their intercourse at Santa Chiara was added that closer sympathy produced by the sense of isolation. They were enclosed in their common risk as in some secret meeting-place where no consciousness of the outer world intruded; and though their talk kept the safe level of their immediate concerns he felt the change in every inflection of Fulvia's voice and in the subtler emphasis of her silences.

The way was long, and he had feared that she would be taxed beyond her strength; but the miles seemed to fly beneath their horses' feet, and they could scarcely believe that the dark hills which rose ahead of them against a whitening sky marked the limit of their journey.

With some difficulty they found their way to the vine-dresser's house, a mere hut in a remote fold of the

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hills. From motives of prudence they had not warned the nurse of their coming; but they found the old woman already at work in her melon-patch and learned from her that her son had gone down to his day's labor in the valley. She received Fulvia with a tender wonder, as at some supernatural presence descending into her life, too much awed, till the first embraces were over, to risk any conjecture as to Odo's presence. But with the returning sense of familiarity—the fancied recovery of the nursling's features in the girl's definite outline—came the inevitable reaction of curiosity, and the fugitives felt themselves coupled in the old woman's meaning smiles. To Odo's surprise Fulvia received these innuendoes with baffling composure, parrying the questions she seemed to answer, and finally taking refuge in a plea for rest. But the accord of the previous night was broken; and when the travellers set out again, starting a little before sunset to avoid the vine-dresser's return, the constraint of the day began to weigh upon them. In Fulvia's case physical weariness perhaps had a share in the change; but whatever the cause, its effect was to make this stage of the journey strangely tedious to both.

Their way lay through the country north of Vicenza, whence they hoped by dawn to gain Peschiera on the lake of Garda, and hire a chaise which should take them across the border. For the first hour or two they had

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the new moon to light them; but as it set the sky clouded and drops of rain began to fall. Fulvia had hitherto shown a gay indifference to the discomforts of the journey; but she presently began to complain of the cold and to question Odo anxiously as to the length of the way. The hilliness of the country forced them to travel slowly, and it seemed to Odo that hours had elapsed before they saw lights in the valley below them. Their plan had been to avoid the towns on their way, and Fulvia, the night before, had contented herself with a half-hour's rest by the roadside; but a heavy rain was now falling, and she at once assented to Odo's tentative proposal that they should take shelter till the storm was over.

They dismounted at an inn on the outskirts of the village. The sleepy landlord stared as he unbarred the door and led them into the kitchen; but he offered no comment beyond remarking that it was a good night to be under cover.

Fulvia sank down on the wooden settle near the chimney, where a fire had been hastily kindled. She took no notice of Odo when he removed the dripping cloak from her shoulders, but sat gazing before her in a kind of apathy.

"I cannot eat," she said, as Odo pressed her to take her place at the table.

The innkeeper turned to him with a confidential

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nod. "Your lady looks fairly beaten," he said. "I've a notion that one of my good beds would be more to her taste than the best supper in the land. Shall I have a room made ready for your excellencies?"

"No, no," said Fulvia, starting up. "We must set out again as soon as we have supped."

She approached the table and hastily emptied the glass of country wine that Odo had poured out for her.

The innkeeper seemed a simple unsuspicious fellow, but at this he put down the plate of cheese he was carrying and looked at her curiously.

"Start out again at this hour of the night?" he exclaimed. "By the saints, your excellencies must be running a race with the sun! Or do you doubt my being able to provide you with decent lodgings, that you prefer mud and rain to my good sheets and pillows?"

"Indeed, no," Odo amicably interposed; "but we are hurrying to meet a friend who is to rejoin us to-morrow at Peschiera."

"Ah—at Peschiera," said the other, as though the name had struck him. He took a dish of eggs from the fire and set it before Fulvia. "Well," he went on with a shrug, "it is written that none of my beds shall be slept in to-night. Not two hours since I had a gentleman here that gave the very same excuse for hurrying forward; though his horses were so spent that I had to provide him with another pair before he could

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continue his journey." He laughed and uncorked a second bottle.

"That reminds me," he went on, pausing suddenly before Fulvia, "that the other gentleman was travelling to meet a friend too; a lady, he said—a young lady. He fancied she might have passed this way and questioned me closely; but as it happened there had been no petticoat under my roof for three days.—I wonder, now, if he could have been looking for your excellencies?"

Fulvia flushed high at this, but a sign from Odo checked the denial on her lips.

"Why," said he, "it is not unlikely, though I had fancied our friend would come from another direction. What was this gentleman like?"

The landlord hesitated, evidently not so much from any reluctance to impart what he knew as from the inability to express it. "Well," said he, trying to supplement his words by a vaguely descriptive gesture, "he was a handsome personable-looking man—smallish built, but with a fine manner, and dressed not unlike your excellency."

"Ah," said Odo carelessly, "our friend is an ecclesiastic.—And which way did this gentleman travel?" he went on, pouring himself another glass.

The landlord assumed an air of country cunning. "There 's the fishy part of it," said he. "He gave orders

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to go toward Verona; but my boy, who chased the carriage down the road, as lads will, says that at the crossways below the old mill the driver took the turn for Peschiera."

Fulvia at this seemed no longer able to control herself. She came close to Odo and said in a low urgent tone: "For heaven's sake, let us set forward!"

Odo again signed to her to keep silent, and with an effort she resumed her seat and made a pretence of eating. A moment later he despatched the landlord to the stable, to see that the horses had been rubbed down; and as soon as the door closed she broke out passionately.

"It is my fault," she cried, "it is all my fault for coming here. If I had had the courage to keep on this would never have happened!"

"No," said Odo quietly, "and we should have gone straight to Peschiera and landed in the arms of our pursuer—if this mysterious traveller is in pursuit of us."

His tone seemed to steady her. "Oh," she said, and the color flickered out of her face.

"As it happens," he went on, "nothing could have been more fortunate than our coming here."

"I see—I see—; but now we must go on at once," she persisted.

He looked at her gravely. "This is your wish?"

She seemed seized with a panic fear. "I cannot stay here!" she repeated.

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"Which way shall we go, then? If we continue to Peschiera, and this man is after us, we are lost."

"But if he does not find us he may return here—he will surely return here!"

"He cannot return before morning. It is close on midnight already. Meanwhile you can take a few hours' rest, while I devise means of reaching the lake by some mule-track across the mountain."

It cost him an effort to take this tone with her; but he saw that in her high-strung mood any other would have been less effective. She rose slowly, keeping her eyes on him with the look of a frightened child. "I will do as you wish," she said.

"Let the landlord prepare a bed for you, then. I will keep watch down here and the horses shall be saddled at daylight."

She stood silent while he went to the door to call the innkeeper; but when the order was given, and the door closed again, she disconcerted him by a sudden sob.

"What a burden I am!" she cried. "I had no right to accept this of you." And she turned and fled up the dark stairs.

The night passed and toward dawn the rain ceased. Odo rose from his dreary vigil in the kitchen, and called to the innkeeper to carry up bread and wine to Fulvia's

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room. Then he went out to see that the horses were fed and watered. He had not dared to question the landlord as to the roads, lest his enquiries should excite suspicion; but he hoped to find an ostler who would give him the information he needed.

The stable was empty, however; and he prepared to bait the horses himself. As he stooped to place his lantern on the floor he caught the gleam of a small polished object at his feet. He picked it up and found that it was a silver coat-of-arms, such as are attached to the blinders and saddles of a carriage-harness. His curiosity was aroused, and holding the light closer he recognized the ducal crown of Pianura surmounting the *Humilitas* of the Valseccas.

The discovery was so startling that for some moments he stood gazing at the small object in his hand without being able to steady his confused ideas. Gradually they took shape, and he saw that, if the ornament had fallen from the harness of the traveller who had just preceded them, it was not Fulvia but he himself who was being pursued. But who was it who sought him and to what purpose? One fact alone was clear: the traveller, whoever he was, rode in one of the Duke's carriages, and therefore presumably upon his sovereign's business.

Odo was still trying to thread a way through these conjectures when a yawning ostler pushed open the stable-door.

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"Your excellency is in a hurry to be gone," he said, with a surprised glance.

Odo handed him the coat-of-arms. "Can you tell me what this is?" he asked carelessly. "I picked it up here a moment ago."

The other turned it over and stared. "Why," said he, "that's off the harness of the gentleman that supped here last night—the same that went on later to Peschiera."

Odo proceeded to question him about the mule-tracks over Monte Baldo, and having bidden him saddle the horses in half an hour, crossed the courtyard and re-entered the inn. A grey light was already falling through the windows, and he mounted the stairs and knocked on the door which he thought must be Fulvia's. Her voice bade him enter and he found her seated fully dressed beside the window. She rose with a smile and he saw that she had regained her usual self-possession.

"Do we set out at once?" she asked.

"There is no great haste," he answered. "You must eat first, and by that time the horses will be saddled."

"As you please," she returned, with a readiness in which he divined the wish to make amends for her wilfulness of the previous night. Her eyes and cheeks glowed with an excitement which counterfeited the effects of a night's rest, and he thought he had never seen her more radiant. She approached the table on

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which the wine and bread had been placed, and drew another chair beside her own.

"Will you not share with me?" she asked, filling a glass for him.

He took it from her with a smile. "I have good news for you," he said, holding out the bit of silver which he had brought from the stable.

She examined it wonderingly. "What does this mean?" she asked, looking up at him.

"That it is I who am being followed—and not you."

She started and the ornament slipped from her hand.

"You?" she faltered with a quick change of color.

"This coat-of-arms," he explained, "dropped from the harness of the traveller who left the inn just before our arrival last night."

"Well—" she said, still without understanding; "and do you know the coat?"

Odo smiled. "It is mine," he answered; "and the crown is my cousin's. The traveller must have been a messenger of the Duke's."

She stood leaning against the seat from which she had risen, one hand still grasping it while the other hung inert. Her lips parted but she did not speak. Her pallor disconcerted Odo and he went up to her and took her hand.

"Do you not understand," he said gently, "that there is no farther cause for alarm? I have no reason to think

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that the Duke's messenger is in pursuit of me; but should he be so, and should he overtake us, he has no authority over you and no reason for betraying you to your enemies."

The blood poured back to her face. "Me! My enemies!" she stammered. "It is not of them I think." She raised her head and faced him in a glow.

For a moment he stood stupidly gazing at her; then the mist lifted and through it he saw a great light. . .

. . . . . .

The landlord's knock warned them that their horses waited, and they rode out in the grey morning. The world about them still lay in shade, and as they climbed the wooded defile above the valley Odo was reminded of the days at Donnaz when he had ridden up the mountain in the same early light. Never since then had he felt, as he did now, the boy's easy kinship with the unexpected, the sense that no encounter could be too wonderful to fit in with the mere wonder of living.

To avoid the road to Peschiera they had resolved to cross the Monte Baldo by a mule-track which should bring them out at one of the villages on the eastern shore of Garda; and the search for this path led them up through steep rain-scented woods where they had to part the wet boughs as they passed. From time to time they regained the highway and rode abreast, almost silent at first with the weight of their new nearness,

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and then breaking into talk that was the mere overflow of what they were thinking. There was in truth more to be felt between them than to be said; since, as each was aware, the new light that suffused the present left the future as obscure as before. But what mattered, when the hour was theirs? The narrow kingdom of to-day is better worth ruling over than the widest past or future; but not more than once does a man hold its fugitive sceptre. The past, however, was theirs also: a past so transformed that he must revisit it with her, joyously confronting her new self with the image of her that met them at each turn. Then he had himself to trace in her memories, his transfigured likeness to linger over in the Narcissus-mirror of her faith in him. This interchange of recollections served them as well as any outspoken expression of feeling, and the most commonplace allusion was charged with happy meanings.

Arabia Petræa had been an Eden to such travellers; how much more the happy slopes they were now descending! All the afternoon their path wound down the western incline of Monte Baldo, first under huge olives, then through thickets of laurel and acacia, to emerge on a lower level of lemon and orange groves, with the blue lake showing through a diaper of golden-fruited boughs. Fulvia, to whom this clear-cut southern foliage was as new as the pure intensity of light that bathed it, seemed to herself to be moving through the

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landscape of a dream. It was as though nature had been remodelled, transformed almost, under the touch of their love: as though they had found their way to the Hesperian glades in which poets and painters placed the legendary lovers of antiquity.

Such feelings were intensified by the strangeness of the situation. In Italy the young girls of the middle class, though seemingly allowed a greater freedom of intercourse than the daughters of noblemen, were in reality as strictly guarded. Though, like Fulvia, they might converse with the elderly merchants or scholars frequenting the family table, they were never alone in the company of men, and the high standard of conduct prevailing in the bourgeoisie forbade all thought of clandestine intercourse. This was especially true of the families of men of letters, where the liberal education of the young girls, and their habit of associating as equals with men of serious and cultivated minds, gave them a self-possession disconcerting to the young blood accustomed to conquer with a glance. These girls, as a rule, were married early to men of their own standing, and though the cicisbeo was not unknown after marriage, he was not an authorized member of the household. Fulvia, indeed, belonged to the class most inaccessible to men of Odo's rank: the only class in Italy in which the wife's fidelity was as much esteemed as the innocence of the girl. Such principles had long been

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ridiculed by persons of quality and satirized by poets and playwrights. From Aristophanes to Beaumarchais the cheated husband and the outwitted guardian had been the figures on which the dramatist relied for his comic effects. Even the miser tricked out of his savings was a shade less ridiculous, less grotesquely deserving of his fate, than the husband defrauded of his wife's affection. The plausible adulteress and the adroit seducer had a recognized claim on the sympathy of the public. But the inevitable reaction was at hand; and the new teachers to whom Odo's contemporaries were beginning to listen had thrown a strangely poetic light over the dull figures of the domestic virtues. Faithfulness to the family sanctities, reverence for the marriage tie, courage to sacrifice the loftiest passion to the most plodding duty: these were qualities to touch the fancy of a generation sated with derision. If love as a sentiment was the discovery of the mediæval poets, love as a moral emotion might be called that of the eighteenth-century philosophers, who, for all their celebration of free unions and fatal passions, were really on the side of the angels, were fighting the battle of the spiritual against the sensual, of conscience against appetite.

The imperceptible action of these new influences formed the real barrier between Odo and Fulvia. The girl stood for the embodiment of the purifying emotions that were to renew the world. Her candor, her

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unapproachableness, her simple trust in him, were a part of the magic light which the new idealism had shed over the old social structure. His was, in short, a love large enough to include other emotions: a widening rather than a contraction of the emotional range. Youth and propinquity have before now broken down stronger defences; but Fulvia's situation was an unspoken appeal to her lover's forbearance. The sense that her safety depended on him kept his sentimental impulses in check, and made the happiness of the moment seem, in its exquisite unreality, a mere dreamlike interlude between the facts of life.

Toward sunset they rested in an olive-orchard, tethering their horses to the low boughs. Overhead, through the thin foliage of tarnished silver, the sky, as the moon suffused it, melted from steel blue to a clearer silver. A peasant-woman whose hut stood close by brought them a goat's cheese on a vine-leaf and a jug of spring-water; and as they supped, a little goat-herd, driving his flock down the hill, paused to watch them with furtive woodland eyes.

Odo, questioning him, learned that at the village on the shore below they could obtain a boat to carry them across the lake. Fulvia, for lack of a passport, dared not set foot on Austrian soil; but the Swiss authorities were less exacting and Odo had hopes of crossing the border without difficulty. They set out again presently,

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descending through the grey dusk of the olives till the path became too steep for riding; then Odo lifted Fulvia from the saddle and led the two horses after her. Here and there, between the trees, they caught a momentary glimpse of lights on the shore and the pale gleam of the lake enclosed in black foliage. From the village below came snatches of song and the shrill wail of a pipe; and as the night deepened they saw, far out on the water, the wild flare of the fish-spearers' torches, like comets in an inverted sky.

With nightfall the spirits of both had sunk. Fulvia walked ahead in silence and Odo read a mute apprehension in her drooping outline. Every step brought them nearer to the point they both feared to face, and though each knew what lay in the other's thoughts neither dared break the silence. Odo's mind turned anxiously to the incidents of the morning, to the finding of the ducal coat-of-arms, and to all the possibilities it suggested. What errand save one could have carried an envoy from Pianura to that remote hamlet among the hills? He could scarcely doubt that it was in pursuit of himself that the ducal messenger travelled; but with what object was the journey undertaken? Was he to be recalled in obedience to some new whim of the Duke's? Or had some unforeseen change—he dared not let his thoughts define it—suddenly made his presence needful in Pianura? It was more probable that the pos-

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sibility of his flight with Fulvia had been suggested to the Duke by the ecclesiastical authorities, and that the same hand which had parted them before was again secretly at work. In any case, it was Odo's first business to see his companion safely across the border; and in that endeavor he had now little fear of being thwarted. If the Duke's messenger awaited them at Peschiera he waited in vain; and though their flight across the lake might be known before dawn it would then be no easy matter to overtake them.

In an hour's time, as Odo had hoped, they were putting off from the shore in a blunt-nosed fishing-boat which was the lightest craft the village could provide. The lake was stark calm, and the two boatmen, silhouetted against the moonlight, drove the boat forward with even vigorous strokes. Fulvia, shivering in the autumnal chill, had drawn her hood close about her and sat silent, her face in shade. Measured by their secret apprehensions the boat's progress seemed at first indescribably slow; but gradually the sounds from the shore grew fainter, and the fugitives felt themselves alone in a world enclosed by the moonlit circle of the waters.

As they advanced this sense of isolation and security grew deeper and more impressive. The motionless surface of the lake was enclosed in a wall of mountains which the moonlight seemed to vein with marble. A sky in which the stars were dissolved in white radi-

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ance curved high above their heads; and not a sail flecked the lake or a cloud the sky. The boat seemed suspended alone in some ethereal medium.

Presently one of the boatmen spoke to the other and glanced toward the north. Then the second silently shipped his oar and hoisted the sail. Hardly had he made it fast when a fresh of wind came down the lake and they began to stretch across the bay with spreading canvas. The wind was contrary, but Odo welcomed it, for he saw at once that it would be quicker work to tack to the other shore than to depend on the oars. The scene underwent a sudden change. The silver mirror over which they had appeared to glide was shivered into sparkling fragments, and in the enveloping rush and murmur of the night the boat woke to a creaking straining activity.

The man at the rudder suddenly pointed to a huddle of lights to the south. "Peschiera."

Odo laughed. "We shall soon show it our heels," said he.

The other boatman shrugged his shoulders. "Even an enemy's roof may serve to keep out the storm," he observed philosophically.

"The storm? What storm?"

The man pointed to the north. Against the sky hung a little black cloud, the merest flaw in the perfect curve of the night.

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"The lake is shrewish at this season," the boatman continued. "Did your excellencies burn a candle before starting?"

Odo sat silent, his eyes fixed on the cloud. It was growing visibly now. With every moment its outline seemed to shift and spread, till its black menace dilated to the zenith. The bright water still broke about them in diamond spray; but as the shadow travelled the lake beneath it turned to lead. Then the storm dropped on them. It fell suddenly out of mid-heaven. Sky and water grew black and a long shudder ran through the boat. For a moment she hung back, staggering under a white fury of blows; then the gale seemed to lift and swing her about, and she shot forward through a long tunnel of glistening blackness, bows on for Peschiera.

"The enemy's roof!" thought Odo. He reached for Fulvia's hand and found it in the darkness. The rain was driving against them now and he drew her close and wrapped his cloak about her. She lay still, without a tremor, as though in that shelter no fears could reach her. The night roared about them and the waters seemed to divide beneath their keel. Through the tumult Odo shouted to the boatmen to try to make some harbor north of Peschiera. They shouted back that they must go where the wind willed and bless the saints if they made any harbor at all; and Odo saw that Peschiera was their destiny.

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It was past midnight when they set foot on shore. The rain still fell in torrents and they could hardly grope their way up the steps of the landing-stage. Odo's first concern was to avoid the inn; but the boatmen, exhausted by their efforts and impatient to be under shelter, could not be bribed to seek out another lodging for the travellers. Odo dared not expose Fulvia longer to the storm, and reluctantly they turned toward the inn, trusting that at that hour their coming would attract little notice.

A travelling-carriage stood in the courtyard, and somewhat to Odo's surprise the landlord was still afoot. He led them into the public parlor, which was alight, with a good fire on the hearth. A gentleman in travelling-dress sat near this fire, his back to the door, reading by a shaded candle. He rose as the travellers entered, and Odo recognized the abate de Crucis.

The latter advanced with a smile in which pleasure was more visible than surprise. He bowed slightly to Fulvia, who had shrunk back into the shadow of the doorway; then he turned to Odo and said: "Cavaliere, I have travelled six days to overtake you. The Duke of Pianura is dying and has named you regent."

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VII

ODO heard a slight movement behind him. He turned and saw that Fulvia had vanished. He understood her wish for concealment, but its futility was written in the glance with which de Crucis followed her flight.

The abate continued to speak in urgent tones. "I implore you," he said, "to lose no time in accompanying me to Pianura. The situation there is critical and before now his Highness's death may have placed the reins in your hands." He glanced at his watch. "If your excellency is not too tired to set out at once, my horses can be harnessed within the half hour."

Odo's heart sank. To have let his thoughts dwell on such a possibility seemed to have done little to prepare him for its realization. He hardly understood what de Crucis was saying: he knew only that an hour before he had fancied himself master of his fate and that now he was again in bonds. His first clear thought was that nothing should part him from Fulvia.

De Crucis seemed to read the thought.

"Cavaliere," he said, "at a moment when time is so valuable you will pardon my directness. You are accompanying to Switzerland a lady who has placed herself in your charge—"

Odo made no reply, and the other went on in the

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same firm but courteous tone: "Foreseeing that it would be difficult for you to leave her so abruptly I provided myself, in Venice, with a safe-conduct which will take her safely across the border." He drew a paper from his coat. "This," said he, handing it to Odo, "is the Papal Nuncio's authorization to the Signorina Fulvia Vivaldi, known in religion as Sister Veronica, to absent herself from Italy for an indefinite period. With this passport and a good escort your companion will have no difficulty in rejoining her friends."

Excess of astonishment kept Odo silent for a moment; and in that moment he had as it were a fugitive glimpse into the workings of the great power which still strove for predominance in Italy. A safe-conduct from the Papal Nuncio to Fulvia Vivaldi was equivalent to her release from her vows; and this in turn implied that, for the moment, religious discipline had been frankly sacrificed to the pressure of political necessities. How the invisible hands made and unmade the destinies of those who came in their way! How boldly the Church swept aside her own defences when they obstructed her course! He was conscious, even at the moment, of all that men like de Crucis had to say in defence of this higher expediency, this avowed discrimination between the factors in each fresh combination of circumstances. He had himself felt the complex wonder of thoughtful minds before the Church's per-

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petual miracle of change disguised in immutability; but now he saw only the meaner side of the game, its elements of cruelty and falseness; and he felt himself no more than a frail bark on the dark and tossing seas of ecclesiastical intrigue. For a moment his heart shuddered back from its fate.

"No passport, no safe-conduct," he said at length, "can release me from my duty to the lady who has placed herself in my care. I shall not leave her till she has joined her friends."

De Crucis bowed. "This is the answer I expected," he said, not without sadness.

Odo glanced at him in surprise. The two men, hitherto, had addressed each other as strangers; but now something in the abate's tone recalled to Odo the familiarity of their former intercourse, their deep community of thought, the significance of the days they had spent together in the monastery of Monte Cassino. The association of ideas brought before him the profound sense of responsibility with which, at that time, he had looked forward to such an hour as this.

The abate was watching him gravely.

"Cavaliere," he said, "every instant counts. All you had once hoped to do for Pianura is now yours to accomplish. But in your absence your enemies are not idle. His Highness may revoke your appointment at any hour. Of late I have had his ear, but I have now been

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near a week absent, and you know the Duke is not long constant to one purpose.—Cavaliere," he exclaimed, "I appeal to you not in the name of the God whom you have come to doubt, but in that of your fellow-men, whom you have wished to serve."

Odo looked at him, not without a confused sense of the irony of such an appeal on such lips, yet with the distinct consciousness that it was uttered in all sincerity, and that, whatever their superficial diversity of view, he and de Crucis were at one on those deeper questions that gave the moment its real significance.

"It is impossible," he repeated, "that I should go with you."

De Crucis was again silent, and Odo was aware of the renewed intentness of his scrutiny. "If the lady—" broke from him once; but he checked himself and took a turn in the room.

Meanwhile a resolve was slowly forming itself in Odo. He would not be false to the call which, since his boyhood, had so often made itself heard above the voice of pleasure and self-interest; but he would at least reserve the right to obey it in his own fashion and under conditions which left his private inclination free.

"There may be more than one way of serving one's fellows," he said quietly. "Go back without me, abate. Tell my cousin that I resign my rights to the succes-

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sion. I shall live my own life elsewhere, not unworthily, I hope, but as a private person."

De Crucis had turned pale. For a moment his habitual self-command seemed about to fail him; and Odo could not but see that a sincere personal regret was mingled with the political agent's consciousness of failure.

He himself was chiefly aware of a sense of relief, of self-recovery, as though he had at last solved a baffling enigma and found himself once more at one with his fate.

Suddenly he heard a step behind him. Fulvia had reentered the room. She had put off her drenched cloak, but the hair lay in damp strands on her forehead, deepening her pallor and the lines of weariness under her eyes. She moved across the room, carrying her head high and advancing tranquilly to Odo's side. Even in that moment of confused emotions he was struck by the nobility of her gait and gesture.

She turned to de Crucis, and Odo had the immediate intuition that she had recognized him.

"Will you let me speak a word privately to the cavaliere Valsecca?" she said.

The other bowed silently and turned away. The door closed on him, and Odo and Fulvia remained alone. For a moment neither spoke; then she said: "That was the abate de Crucis?"

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He assented.

She looked at him sadly. "You still believe him to be your friend?"

"Yes," he answered frankly, "I still believe him to be my friend, and, spite of his cloth, the friend of justice and humanity. But he is here simply as the Duke's agent. He has been for some time the governor of Prince Ferrante."

"I knew," she murmured, "I knew—"

He went up to her and caught her hands. "Why do we waste our time upon him?" he exclaimed impatiently. "Nothing matters but that I am free at last."

She drew back, gently releasing herself. "Free—?"

"My choice is made. I have resigned my right to the succession. I shall not return to Pianura."

She continued to stare at him, leaning against the chair from which de Crucis had risen.

"Your choice is made! Your choice is made!" she repeated. "And you have chosen—"

"You," he said simply. "Will you go to France with me, Fulvia? Will you be my wife and work with me at a distance for the cause that, in Italy, we may not serve together? I have never abandoned the aims your father taught me to strive for; they are dearer, more sacred to me than ever; but I cannot strive for them alone. I must feel your hand in mine, I must know that your heart beats with mine, I must hear the voice of liberty

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speak to me in your voice—" He broke off suddenly and went up to her. "All this is nothing," he said. "I love you. I cannot give you up. That is all."

For a moment, as he spoke, her face shone with an extraordinary light. She looked at him intently, as one who seemed to gaze beyond and through him, at some mystic vision that his words evoked. Then the brightness faded.

"The picture you draw is a beautiful one," she said, speaking slowly, in sweet deliberate tones, "but it is not for me to look on. What you said last is not true. If you love me it is because we have thought the same thoughts, dreamed the same dream, heard the same voice—in each other's voices, perhaps, as you say, but none the less a real voice, apart from us and above us, and one which would speak to us as loudly if we were apart—one which both of us must follow to the end."

He gazed at her eagerly as she spoke; and while he gazed there came to him, perversely enough, a vision of the life he was renouncing, not as it concerned the public welfare, but in its merely personal aspect: a vision of the power, the luxury, the sumptuous background of traditional state and prerogative in which his artistic and intellectual tastes, as well as his easy impulses of benevolence, would find unchecked and immediate gratification. It was the first time that he had been aware of such lurking influences under his most

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generous aspirations; but even as Fulvia ceased to speak the vision faded, leaving only an intenser longing to bend her will to his.

"You are right," he rejoined; "we must follow that voice to the end; but why not together? Your father himself often questioned whether the patriot could not serve his people better at a distance than in their midst. In France, where the new ideas are not only tolerated but put in practice, we shall be able to study their effects and to learn how they may best be applied to the relief of our own unhappy people; and as a private person, independent of party and patronage, could I not do more than as the nominal head of a narrow priest-ridden government, where every act and word would be used by my enemies to injure me and the cause I represent?"

The vigor and rapidity of the attack, and the promptness with which he converted her argument to his own use, were not without visible effect. Odo saw his words reflected in the wavering glow of Fulvia's cheek; but almost at once she regained control of her pulses and faced him with that serenity which seemed to come to her at such moments.

"What you say might be true," she answered, "were your opportunities restricted to the regency. But the little prince's life is known to hang on a thread: at any moment you may be Duke. And you will not deny that

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as Duke of Pianura you can serve your people better than as an obscure pamphleteer in Paris."

Odo made an impatient gesture. "Are you so sure?" he said. "Even as Duke I must be the puppet of powers greater than myself—of Austria, of Rome, nay, of the wealthy nobles, who will always league themselves with their sovereign's enemies rather than suffer a hand upon their privileges. And even if I were fortunate enough to outwit my masters and rule indeed, over what a toy kingdom should I reign! How small a number would be benefited! How little the cause would be helped by my example! As an obscure pamphleteer I might reach the hearts of thousands and speak to great kings on their thrones; as Duke of Pianura, fighting single-handed to reform the laws of my little state, I should rank at best with the other petty sovereigns who are amusing themselves all over Italy with agricultural experiments and improved methods of cheese-making."

Again the brightness shone in Fulvia's face. "How you love me!" she said as he paused; and went on, restraining him with a gesture of the gentlest dignity: "For it is love that speaks thus in you and not reason; and you know as I do that the duty to which a man is born comes before any of his own choosing. You are called to serve liberty on a throne, I in some obscure corner of the private life. We can no more exchange our duties than our stations; but if our lives divide, our

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purpose remains one, and as pious persons recall each other in the mystery of the Sacrament, so we shall meet in spirit in the new religion we profess."

Her voice gained strength and measure as she spoke, and Odo felt that all that passion could urge must spend itself in vain against such high security of spirit.

"Go, cavaliere," she continued: "I implore you to lose no time in reaching Pianura. Occasion is short-lived, and an hour's lingering may cost you the regency, and with it the chance of gaining a hold on your people. I will not expatiate, as some might, on the power and dignities that await you. You are no adventurer plotting to steal a throne, but a soldier pledged to his post." She moved close to him and suddenly caught his hand and raised it to her lips. "Your excellency," said she, "has deigned to look for a moment on a poor girl that crossed your path. Now your eyes must be on your people, who will yet have cause to love and bless you as she does."

She shone on him with a weeping brightness that dissolved his very soul.

"Ah," he cried, "you have indeed learned your lesson well! I admire with what stoic calmness you pronounce my doom, with what readiness you dispose of my future!"

"It is not mine to dispose of," she caught him up, "nor yours; but belongs, as much as any slave's to his

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master, to the people you are called to rule. Think for how many generations their unheeded sufferings, their unrewarded toil, have paid for the pomp and pleasure of your house! That is the debt you are called on to acquit, the wrong you are pledged to set right."

Odo was silent. She had found the unanswerable word. Yes, he was called on to acquit the accumulated debt of that long unrighteous rule: it was he who must pay, if need be with the last drop of his blood, for the savage victories of Bracciaforte, the rapacity of Guidobaldo, the magnificence of Ascanio, the religious terrors and secret vices of the poor Duke now nearing his end. All these passions had preyed on the people, on the tillers and weavers and vine-dressers, obscure servants of a wasteful greatness: theirs had been the blood that renewed the exhausted veins of their rulers, through generation after generation of dumb labor and privation. And the noblest passions, as well as the basest, had been nourished at the same cost. Every flower in the ducal gardens, every picture on the palace walls, every honor in the ancient annals of the house, had been planted, paid for, fought for by the people. With mute inconscient irony the two powers had faced each other for generations: the subjects never guessing that their sovereigns were puppets of their own making, the Dukes that all their pomp and cir-

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cumstance were but a borrowed motley. Now the evil wrought in ignorance remained to be undone in the light of the world's new knowledge: the discovery of that universal brotherhood which Christ had long ago proclaimed, and which, after so many centuries, those who denied Christ were the first to put in practice. Hour by hour, day by day, at the cost of every personal inclination, of all that endears life and ennobles failure, Odo must set himself to redeem the credit of his house. He saw his way straight before him; but in that hour of insight his heart's instinct of self-preservation made one last effort against fate.

He turned to Fulvia.

"You are right," he said; "I have no choice. You have shown me the way; but must I travel it alone? You ask me to give up at a stroke all that makes life desirable: to set forth, without a backward glance, on the very road that leads me farthest from you! Yesterday I might have obeyed; but how can I turn to-day from this near view of my happiness?"

He paused a moment and she seemed about to answer; but he hurried on without giving her time. "Fulvia, if you ask this sacrifice of me, is there none you will make in return? If you bid me go forth and work for my people, will you not come with me and work for them too?" He stretched out his hands, in a gesture that seemed to sum up his infinite need of her, and for a

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moment they faced each other, silenced by the nearness of great issues.

She knew well enough what he offered. According to the code of the day there was no dishonor in the offer and it did not occur to her to resent it. But she looked at him sadly and he read her refusal in the look.

"The Regent's mistress?" she said slowly. "The key to the treasury, the back-door to preferment, the secret trafficker in titles and appointments? That is what I should stand for—and it is not to such services that you must even appear to owe your power. I will not say that I have my own work to do; for the dearest service I could perform would be to help you in yours. But to do this I must stand aside. To be near you I must go from you. To love you I must give you up."

She looked him full in the eyes as she spoke; then she went up to him and kissed him. It was the first kiss she had given him since she had thrown herself in his arms in her father's garden; but now he felt her whole being on her lips.

He would have held her fast, forgetting everything in the sweetness of her surrender; but she drew back quickly and, before he could guess her intention, threw open the door of the room to which de Crucis had withdrawn.

"Signor abate!" she said.

The Jesuit came forward. Odo was dimly aware that,

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for an instant, the two measured each other; then Fulvia said quietly:

"His excellency goes with you to Pianura."

What more she said, or what de Crucis answered, he could never afterward recall. He had a confused sense of having cried out a last unavailing protest, faintly, inarticulately, like a man struggling to make himself heard in a dream; then the room grew dark about him, and in its stead he saw the old chapel at Donnaz, with its dimly-gleaming shrine, and heard the voice of the chaplain, harsh and yet strangely shaken:—"My chief prayer for you is that, should you be raised to this eminence, it may be at a moment when such advancement seems to thrust you in the dust."

Odo lifted his head and saw de Crucis standing alone before him.

"I am ready," he said.

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BOOK IV

THE REWARD

Where are the portraits of those who have perished in spite of their vows?

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BOOK IV

THE REWARD

I

ONE bright March day in the year 1783 the bells of Pianura began to ring at sunrise, and with their first peal the townsfolk were abroad.

The city was already dressed for a festival. A canopy of crimson velvet, surmounted by the ducal crown and by the *Humilitas* of the Valseccas, hid the columns of the Cathedral porch and fell in royal folds about the featureless porphyry lions who had seen so many successive rulers ascend the steps between their outstretched paws. The frieze of ramping and running animals around the ancient baptistery was concealed by heavy green garlands alternating with religious banners; and every church and chapel had draped its doorway with crimson and placed above the image of its patron saint the ducal crown of Pianura.

No less sumptuous was the adornment of the private dwellings. The great families—the Trescorri, the Belverdi, the Pievepelaghi—had outdone each other in the display of golden-threaded tapestries and Genoese velvets emblazoned with armorial bearings; and even the sombre façade of the Boscofolto palace showed a rich drapery surmounted by the quarterings of the new Marchioness.

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But it was not only the palace-fronts that had put on a holiday dress. The contagion had spread to the poorer quarters, and in many a narrow street and crooked lane, where surely no part of the coming pageant might be expected to pass, the crazy balconies and unglazed windows were decked out with scraps of finery: a yard or two of velvet filched from the state hangings of some noble house, a torn and discolored church banner, even a cast-off sacque of brocade or a peasant's holiday kerchief, skilfully draped about the rusty iron and held in place by pots of clove-pink and sweet basil. The half-ruined palace which had once housed Gamba and Momola showed a few shreds of color on its sullen front, and the abate Crescenti's modest house, wedged in a corner of the city walls, was dressed like the altar of a Lady Chapel; while even the tanners' quarter by the river displayed its festoons of colored paper and tinsel, ingeniously twisted into the semblance of a crown.

For the new Duke, who was about to enter his capital in state, was extraordinarily popular with all classes. His popularity, as yet, was mainly due to a general detestation of the rule he had replaced; but such a sentiment gives to a new sovereign an impetus which, if he knows how to use it, will carry him a long way toward success; and among those in the Duke's confidence it was rumored that he was qualified not only to profit

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by the expectations he had raised but to fulfil them. The last months of the late Duke's life had plunged the duchy into such political and financial disorder that all parties were agreed in welcoming a change. Even those that had most to lose by the accession of the new sovereign, or most to fear from the policy he was known to favor, preferred the possibility of new evils to a continuance of present conditions. The expertest angler in troubled waters may find waters too troubled for his sport; and under a government where power is passed from hand to hand like the handkerchief in a children's game, the most adroit time-server may find himself grasping the empty air.

It would indeed have been difficult to say who had ruled during the year preceding the Duke's death. Prime-ministers had succeeded each other like the clowns in a harlequinade. Just as the Church seemed to have gained the upper hand some mysterious revulsion of feeling would fling the Duke toward Trescorre and the liberals; and when these had attempted, by some trifling concession to popular feeling, to restore the credit of the government, their sovereign, seized by religious scruples, would hastily recall the clerical party. So the administration staggered on, reeling from one policy to another, clutching now at this support and now at that, while Austria and the Holy See hung on its steps, awaiting the inevitable fall.

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A cruel winter and a fresh outbreak of the silk-worm disease had aggravated the misery of the people, while the mounting extravagance of the Duchess had put a last strain on the exhausted treasury. The consequent increase of the salt-tax roused such popular fury that Father Ignazio, who was responsible for the measure, was dismissed by the panic-stricken Duke, and Trescorre, as usual, called in to repair his rival's mistake. But it would have taken a greater statesman than Trescorre to reach the root of such evils; and the new minister succeeded neither in pacifying the people nor in reassuring his sovereign.

Meanwhile the Duke was sinking under the mysterious disease which had hung upon him since his birth. It was hinted that his last hours were darkened by hallucinations, and the pious pictured him as haunted by profligate visions, while the free-thinkers maintained that he was the dupe of priestly jugglery. Toward the end there was the inevitable rumor of *acqua tofana*, and the populace cried out that the Jesuits were at work again. It seems more probable, however, that his Highness, who had assisted at the annual festival of the Madonna del Monte, and had mingled on foot with the swarm of devotees thronging thither from all parts, had contracted a pestilent disorder from one of the pilgrims. Certain it is that death came in a dreadful form. The Duchess, alarmed for the health of Prince Fer-

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rante, fled with him to the dower-house by the Piana; and the strange nature of his Highness's distemper caused many to follow her example. Even the Duke's servants, and the quacks that lived on his bounty, were said to have abandoned the death-chamber; and an English traveller passing through Pianura boasted that, by the payment of a small fee to the palace porter, he had obtained leave to enter his Highness's closet and peer through the doorway at the dying man. However this may be, it would appear that the Duke's confessor —a monk of the Barnabite order—was not to be found when his Highness called for him; and the servant sent forth in haste to fetch a priest returned, strangely enough, with the abate Crescenti, whose suspected orthodoxy had so long made him the object of the Duke's detestation. He it was who alone witnessed the end of that tormented life, and knew upon what hopes or fears it closed.

Meanwhile it appeared that the Duchess's precautions were not unfounded; for Prince Ferrante presently sickened of the same malady which had cut off his father, and when the Regent, travelling post-haste, arrived in Pianura, he had barely time to pass from the Duke's obsequies to the death-bed of the heir.

Etiquette required that a year of mourning should elapse between the accession of the new sovereign and his state entry into his capital; so that if Duke Odo's

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character and intentions were still matter of conjecture to his subjects, his appearance was already familiar to them. His youth, his good looks, his open mien, his known affability of manner, were so many arguments in his favor with an impressionable and impulsive people; and it was perhaps natural that he should interpret as a tribute to his principles the sympathy which his person aroused.

It is certain that he fancied himself, at that time, as well-acquainted with his subjects as they believed themselves to be with him; and the understanding supposed to exist was productive of equal satisfaction to both sides. The new Duke had thrown himself with extraordinary zeal into the task of loving and understanding his people. It had been his refuge from a hundred doubts and uncertainties, the one clearly-defined object in an obscure and troubled fate. And their response had, almost immediately, turned his task into a pleasure. It was so easy to rule if one's subjects loved one! And so easy to be loved if only one loved enough in return! If he did not, like the Pope, describe himself to his people as the servant of the servants of God, he at least longed to make them feel that this new gospel of service was the base on which all sovereignty must henceforth repose.

It was not that his first year of power had been without moments of disillusionment. He had had more than

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one embittering experience of intrigue and perfidy, more than one glimpse of the pitfalls besetting his course; but his confidence in his own powers and his faith in his people remained unshaken, and with two such beliefs to sustain him it seemed as though no difficulties would prove insurmountable.

Such at least was the mood in which, on the morning of his entry into Pianura, he prepared to face his subjects. Strangely enough, the state entry began at Ponte di Po, the very spot where, on a stormy midnight some seven years earlier, the new Duke had landed, a fugitive from his future realm. Here, according to an ancient custom, the sovereign awaited the arrival of his ministers and court; and then, taking seat in his state barge, proceeded by water to Pianura, followed by an escort of galleys.

A great tent hung with tapestries had been set up on the river-bank; and here Odo awaited the approach of the barge. As it touched at the landing-stage he stepped out, and his prime-minister, Count Trescorre, advanced toward him, accompanied by the dignitaries of the court. Trescorre had aged in the intervening years. His delicate features had withered like a woman's, and the fine irony of his smile had taken an edge of cruelty. His face suggested a worn engraving, the lines of which have been deepened by a too-incisive instrument.

The functionaries attending him were, with few ex-

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ceptions, the same who had figured in a like capacity at the late sovereign's court. With the passing of the years they had grown heavier or thinner, more ponderous or stiffer in their movements, and as they advanced, in their splendid but unwieldy court dress, they seemed to Odo like superannuated marionettes whose springs and wires have rusted from disuse.

The barge was a magnificent gilded Bucentaur, presented to the late Duke's father by the Doge of Venice, and carved by his Serenity's most famous sculptors in wood. Tritons and sea-goddesses encircled the prow and throned above the stern, and the interior of the deck-house was adorned with delicate *rilievi* and painted by Tiepolo with scenes from the myth of Amphitrite. Here the new Duke seated himself, surrounded by his household, and presently the heavy craft, rowed by sixty galley-slaves, was moving slowly up the river toward Pianura.

In the clear spring light the old walled city, with its domes and towers, rose pleasantly among budding orchards and fields. Close at hand were the crenellations of Bracciaforte's keep, and just beyond, the ornate cupola of the royal chapel, symbolizing in their proximity the successive ambitions of the ducal race; while the round-arched campanile of the Cathedral and the square tower of the mediæval town-hall sprang up side by side, marking the centre of the free city which the

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Valseccas had subjugated. It seemed to the new Duke, who was given to such reflections, that he could read his race's history in that broken sky-line; but he was soon snatched from its perusal by the shouts of the crowd who thronged the river-bank to greet his approach.

As the Bucentaur touched at the landing-stage and Odo stepped out on the red carpet strewn with flowers, while cannon thundered from the walls and the bells burst into renewed jubilation, he felt himself for the first time face to face with his people. The very ceremonial which in other cases kept them apart was now a means of closer communication; for it was to show himself to them that he was making a public entry into his capital, and it was to see him that the city had poured forth her shouting throngs. The shouts rose and widened as he advanced, enveloping him in a mounting tide of welcome, in which cannon, bells and voices—the decreed and the spontaneous acclamations—were indistinguishably merged. In like manner, approbation of his person was mingled with a simple enjoyment of the show of which he formed a part; and it must have taken a more experienced head than Odo's to distinguish between the two currents of enthusiasm on which he felt himself swept forward.

The pageant was indeed brilliant enough to justify the popular transport; and the fact that the new Duke formed a worthy centre to so much magnificence was

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not lost on his splendor-loving subjects. The late sovereign had so long held himself aloof that the city was unaccustomed to such shows, and as the procession wound into the square before the Cathedral, where the thickest of the crowd was massed, the very pealing of the church-bells was lost in the roar of human voices.

Don Serafino, the Bishop's nephew, and now Master of the Horse, rode first, on a splendid charger, preceded by four trumpets and followed by his esquires; then came the court dignitaries, attended by their pages and *staffieri* in gala liveries, the marshals with their staves, the masters of ceremony, and the clergy mounted on mules trapped with velvet, each led by two running footmen. The Duke rode next, alone and somewhat pale. Two pages of arms, helmeted and carrying lances, walked at his horse's bridle; and behind him came his household and ministers, with their gentlemen and a long train of servants, followed by the regiment of light horse which closed the procession.

The houses surrounding the square afforded the best point of view to those unwilling to mix with the crowd in the streets; and among the spectators thronging the windows and balconies, and leaning over the edge of the leads, were many who, from one motive or another, felt a personal interest in the new Duke. The Marchioness of Boscofolto had accepted a seat in the windows of the Pievepelago palace, which formed an angle

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of the square, and she and her hostess—the same lady who had been relieved of her diamond necklace by footpads suspected of wearing the Duchess's livery—sat observing the scene behind the garlanded balconies of the *piano nobile*. In the mezzanin windows of a neighboring wine-shop the bookseller Andreoni, with half a dozen members of the philosophical society to which Odo had belonged, peered above the heads of the crowd thronging the arcade, and through a dormer of the leads Carlo Gamba, the assistant in the ducal library, looked out on the triumph of his former patron. Among the Church dignitaries grouped about his Highness was Father Ignazio, the late Duke's confessor, now Prior of the Dominicans, and said to be withdrawn from political life. Seated on his richly-trapped mule he observed the scene with impassive face; while, from his place in the long line of minor clergy, the abate Crescenti, with eyes of infinite tenderness and concern, watched the young Duke solemnly ascending the Cathedral steps.

In the porch the Bishop waited, impressive as ever in his white and gold dalmatic, against the red robes of the chapter. Preceded by two chamberlains Odo mounted the steps amid the sudden silence of the people. The great bronze portals of the Cathedral, which were never opened save on occasions of state, swung slowly inward, pouring a wave of music and incense out upon the hushed sunlit square; then they closed again, engulph-

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ing the brilliant procession—the Duke, the Bishop, the clergy and the court—and leaving the populace to scatter in search of the diversions prepared for them at every street-corner.

It was not till late that night that the new Duke found himself alone. He had withdrawn at last from the torch-lit balcony overlooking the square, whither the shouts of his subjects had persistently recalled him. Silence was falling on the illuminated streets, and the dimness of midnight upon the sky through which rocket after rocket had torn its brilliant furrows. In the palace a profounder stillness reigned. Since his accession Odo, out of respect for the late Duke, had lodged in one of the wings of the great building; but tradition demanded that he should henceforth inhabit the ducal apartments, and thither, at the close of the day's ceremonies, his gentlemen had conducted him.

Trescorre had asked permission to wait on him before he slept; and he knew that the prime-minister would be kept late by his conference with the secret police, whose nightly report could not be handed in till the festivities were over. Meanwhile Odo was in no mood for sleep. He sat alone in the closet, still hung with saints' images and jewelled reliquaries, where his cousin had so often given him audience, and whence, through the open door, he could see the embroidered curtains and plumed baldachin of the state bed which was presently to re-

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ceive him. All day his heart had beat with high ambitions; but now a weight sank upon his spirit. The reaction from the tumultuous welcome of the streets to the closely-guarded silence of the palace made him feel how unreal was the fancied union between himself and his people, how insuperable the distance that tradition and habit had placed between them. In the narrow closet where his predecessor had taken refuge from the detested task of reigning, the new Duke felt the same moral lassitude steal over him. How was such a puny will as his to contend against the great forces of greed and prejudice? All the influences arrayed against him—tradition, superstition, the lust of power, the arrogance of race—seemed concentrated in the atmosphere of that silent room, with its guarded threshold, its pious relics, and, lying on the desk in the embrasure of the window, the manuscript litany which the late Duke had not lived to complete.

Oppressed by his surroundings, Odo rose and entered the bed-chamber. A lamp burned before the image of the Madonna at the head of the bed, and two lighted flambeaux flanked the picture of the Last Judgment on the opposite wall. Odo remembered the look of terror which the Duke had fixed on the picture during their first strange conversation. A praying-stool stood beneath it, and it was said that here, rather than before the Virgin's image, the melancholy prince per-

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formed his private devotions. The horrors of the scene were depicted with a childish minuteness of detail, as though the painter had sought to produce an impression of moral anguish by the accumulation of physical sufferings; and just such puerile images of the wrath to come may have haunted the mysterious recesses of the Duke's imagination. Crescenti had told Odo how the dying man's thoughts had seemed to centre upon this dreadful subject, and how again and again, amid his ravings, he had cried out that the picture must be burned, as though the sight of it was become intolerable to him.

Odo's own mind, across which the events and emotions of the day still threw the fantastic shadows of an expiring illumination, was wrought to the highest state of impressionability. He saw in a flash all that the picture must have symbolized to his cousin's fancy; and in his desire to reconstruct that dying vision of fleshly retribution, he stepped close to the diptych, resting a knee upon the stool beneath it. As he did so, the picture suddenly opened, disclosing the inner panel. Odo caught up one of the flambeaux, and in its light, as on a sunlit wave, there stepped forth to him the lost Venus of Giorgione.

He knew the picture in an instant. There was no mistaking the glow of the limbs, the midsummer languor of the smile, the magical atmosphere in which the

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gold of sunlight, of autumn leaves, of amber grapes, seemed fused by some lost alchemy of the brush. As he gazed, the scene changed, and he saw himself in a darkened room with cabalistic hangings. He saw Heiligenstern's tall figure, towering in supernatural light, the Duke leaning eagerly forward, the Duchess with set lips and troubled eyes, the little prince bent wonderingly above the magic crystal. . .

A step in the antechamber announced Trescorre's approach. Odo returned to the cabinet and the minister advanced with a low bow. The two men had had time to grow accustomed to the new relation in which they stood to one another, yet there were moments when, to Odo, the past seemed to lie like fallen leaves beneath Trescorre's steps—Donna Laura, fond and foolish in her weeds, Gamba, Momola, and the poor featherhead Cerveno, dying at nineteen of a distemper because he had stood in the other's way. The impression was strong on him now—but it was only momentary. Habit reasserted itself, and the minister effaced the man. Odo signed to Trescorre to seat himself and the latter silently presented his report.

He was a diligent and capable administrator, and however mixed might be the motives which attached him to his sovereign, they did not interfere with the exact performance of his duties. Odo knew this and was

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grateful for it. He knew that Trescorre, ambitious of the regency, had intrigued against him to the last. He knew that an intemperate love of power was the mainspring of that seemingly dispassionate nature. But death had crossed Trescorre's schemes; and he was too adroit an opportunist not to see that his best chance now lay in making himself indispensable to his new sovereign. Of all this Odo was aware; but his own motives in appointing Trescorre did not justify his looking for great disinterestedness in his minister. The irony of circumstances had forced them upon each other, and each knew that the other understood the situation and was prepared to make the best of it.

The Duke presently rose, and handed back to Trescorre the reports of the secret police. They were the documents he most disliked to handle.

"You have acquitted yourself admirably of your disagreeable duties," he said with a smile. "I hope I have done as well. At any rate the day is over."

Trescorre returned the smile, with his usual tinge of irony. "Another has already begun," said he.

"Ah," said Odo, with a touch of impatience, "are we not to sleep on our laurels?"

Trescorre bowed. "Austria, your Highness, never sleeps."

Odo looked at him with surprise. "What do you mean?"

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"That I have to remind your Highness—"

"Of what—?"

Trescorre had one of his characteristic pauses.

"That the Duke of Monte Alloro is in failing health —and that her Highness's year of widowhood ended yesterday."

There was a silence. Odo, who had reseated himself, rose and walked to the window. The shutters stood open and he looked out over the formless obscurity of the gardens. Above the intervening masses of foliage the Borromini wing raised its vague grey bulk. He saw lights in Maria Clementina's apartments and wondered if she still waked. An hour or two earlier she had given him her hand in the contra-dance at the state ball. It was her first public appearance since the late Duke's death, and with the laying off of her weeds she had regained something of her former brilliancy. At the moment he had hardly observed her: she had seemed a mere inanimate part of the pageant of which he formed the throbbing centre. But now the sense of her nearness pressed upon him. She seemed close to him, ingrown with his fate; and with the curious duality of vision that belongs to such moments he beheld her again as she had first shone on him—the imperious child whom he had angered by stroking her spaniel, the radiant girl who had welcomed him on his return to Pianura. Trescorre's voice aroused him.

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"At any moment," the minister was saying, "her Highness may fall heir to Monte Alloro. It is the moment for which Austria waits. There is always an Archduke ready—and her Highness is still a young woman."

Odo turned slowly from the window. "I have told you that this is impossible," he murmured.

Trescorre looked down and thoughtfully fingered the documents in his hands.

"Your Highness," said he, "is as well-acquainted as your ministers with the difficulties that beset us. Monte Alloro is one of the richest states in Italy. It is a pity to alienate such revenues from Pianura."

The new Duke was silent. His minister's words were merely the audible expression of his own thoughts. He knew that the future welfare of Pianura depended on the annexation of Monte Alloro. He owed it to his people to unite the two sovereignties.

At length he said: "You are building upon an unwarrantable assumption."

Trescorre raised an interrogative glance.

"You assume her Highness's consent."

The minister again paused; and his pause seemed to flash an ironical light on the poverty of the other's defences.

"I come straight from her Highness," said he quietly, "and I assume nothing that I am not in a position to affirm."

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Odo turned on him with a start. "Do I understand that you have presumed—?"

His minister raised a deprecating hand. "Sir," said he, "the Archduke's envoy is in Pianura."

II

ODO, on his return to Pianura, had taken it for granted that de Crucis would remain in his service. There had been little talk between the two on the way. The one was deep in his own wretchedness, and the other had too fine a tact to intrude on it; but Odo felt the nearness of that penetrating sympathy which was almost a gift of divination. He was glad to have de Crucis at his side at a moment when any other companionship had been intolerable; and in the egotism of his misery he imagined that he could dispose as he pleased of his friend's future.

After the little prince's death, however, de Crucis had at once asked permission to leave Pianura. He was perhaps not displeased by Odo's expressions of surprise and disappointment; but they did not alter his decision. He reminded the new Duke that he had been called to Pianura as governor to the late heir, and that, death having cut short his task, he had now no farther pretext for remaining.

Odo listened with a strange sense of loneliness. The

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responsibilities of his new state weighed heavily on the musing speculative side of his nature. Face to face with the sudden summons to action, with the necessity for prompt and not too-curious choice of means and method, he felt a stealing apathy of the will, an inclination toward the subtle duality of judgment that had so often weakened and diffused his energies. At such a crisis it seemed to him that, de Crucis gone, he remained without a friend. He urged the abate to reconsider his decision, begging him to choose a post about his person.

De Crucis shook his head.

"The offer," said he, "is more tempting to me than your Highness can guess; but my business here is at an end, and must be taken up elsewhere. My calling is that of a pedagogue. When I was summoned to take charge of Prince Ferrante's education I gave up my position in the household of Prince Bracciano not only because I believed that I could make myself more useful in training a future sovereign than the son of a private nobleman, but also," he added with a smile, "because I was curious to visit a state of which your Highness had so often spoken, and because I believed that my residence here might enable me to be of service to your Highness. In this I was not mistaken; and I will gladly remain in Pianura long enough to give your Highness such counsels as my experience suggests; but that business discharged, I must ask leave to go."

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From this position no entreaties could move him; and so fixed was his resolve that it confirmed the idea that he was still a secret agent of the Jesuits. Strangely enough, this did not prejudice Odo, who was more than ever under the spell of de Crucis's personal influence. Though Odo had been acquainted with many professed philosophers he had never met among them a character so nearly resembling the old stoical ideal of temperance and serenity, and he could never be long with de Crucis without reflecting that the training which could form and nourish so noble a nature must be other than the world conceived it.

De Crucis, however, frankly pointed out that his former connection with the Jesuits was too well known in Pianura not to be an obstacle in the way of his usefulness.

"I own," said he, "that before the late Duke's death I exerted such influence as I possessed to bring about your Highness's appointment as regent; but the very connections that favored me with your predecessor must stand in the way of my serving your Highness. Nothing could be more fatal to your prospects than to have it said that you had chosen a former Jesuit as your adviser. In the present juncture of affairs it is needful that you should appear to be in sympathy with the liberals, and that whatever reforms you attempt should seem the result of popular pressure rather than of your

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own free choice. Such an attitude may not flatter the sovereign's pride, and is in fact merely a higher form of expediency; but it is one which the proudest monarchs of Europe are finding themselves constrained to take if they would preserve their power and use it effectually."

Soon afterward de Crucis left Pianura; but before leaving he imparted to Odo the result of his observations while in the late Duke's service. De Crucis's view was that of the more thoughtful men of his day who had not broken with the Church, yet were conscious that the whole social system of Europe was in need of renovation. The movement of ideas in France, and their rapid transformation into legislative measures of unforeseen importance, had as yet made little impression in Italy; and the clergy in particular lived in serene unconsciousness of any impending change. De Crucis, however, had been much in France, and had frequented the French churchmen, who (save in the highest ranks of the hierarchy) were keenly alive to the need of reform, and ready, in many instances, to sacrifice their own privileges in the public cause. These men, living in their provincial cures or abbeys, were necessarily in closer contact with the people, better acquainted with their needs and more competent to relieve them, than the city demagogues theorizing in Parisian coffee-houses on the Rights of Man and the Code of Nature.

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But the voice of the demagogues carried farther than that of the clergy; and such revolutionary notions as crossed the Alps had more to do with the founding of future Utopias than with the remedy of present evils.

Even in France the temperate counsels of the clergy were being overruled by the sentimental imprudences of the nobles and by the bluster of the politicians. It was to put Odo on his guard against these two influences that de Crucis was chiefly anxious; but the intelligent coöperation of the clergy was sadly lacking in his administrative scheme. He knew that Odo could not count on the support of the Church party, and that he must make what use he could of the liberals in his attempts at reform. The clergy of Pianura had been in power too long to believe in the necessity of conceding anything to the new spirit; and since the banishment of the Society of Jesus the presumption of the other orders had increased instead of diminishing. The priests, whatever their failings, had attached the needy by a lavish bounty; and they had a powerful auxiliary in the Madonna of the Mountain, who drew pilgrims from all parts of Italy and thus contributed to the material welfare of the state as well as to its spiritual privileges. To the common people their Virgin was not only a protection against disease and famine, but a kind of oracle, who by divers signs and tokens gave evidence of divine approval or displeasure; and it was naturally to the

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priests that the faithful looked for a reading of these phenomena. This gave the clergy a powerful hold on the religious sensibilities of the people; and more than once the manifest disapproval of the Mountain Madonna had turned the scales against some economic measure which threatened the rights of her augurs.

De Crucis understood the force of these traditional influences; but Odo, in common with the more cultivated men of his day, had lived too long in an atmosphere of polite scepticism to measure the profound hold of religion on the consciousness of the people. Christ had been so long banished from the drawing-room that it was hard to believe that He still ruled in field and vineyard. To men of Odo's stamp the piety of the masses was a mere superficial growth, a kind of mental mould to be dried off by the first beams of knowledge. He did not conceive it as a habit of thought so old that it had become instinctive, so closely intertwined with every sense that to hope to eradicate it was like trying to drain all the blood from a man's body without killing him. He knew nothing of the unwearied workings of that power, patient as a natural force, which, to reach spirits darkened by ignorance and eyes dulled by toil, had stooped to a thousand disguises, humble, tender and grotesque—peopling the earth with a new race of avenging or protecting deities, guarding the babe in the cradle and the cattle in the stalls,

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blessing the good man's vineyard or blighting the crops of the blasphemer, guiding the lonely traveller over torrents and precipices, smoothing the sea and hushing the whirlwind, praying with the mother over her sick child, and watching beside the dead in plague-house and lazaret and galley—entering into every joy and grief of the obscurest consciousness, penetrating to depths of misery which no human compassion ever reached, and redressing by a prompt and summary justice wrongs of which no human legislation took account.

Odo's first act after his accession had been to recall the political offenders banished by his predecessor; and so general was the custom of marking the opening of a new reign by an amnesty to political exiles, that Trescorre offered no opposition to the measure. Andreoni and his friends at once returned to Pianura, and Gamba at the same time emerged from his mysterious hiding-place. He was the only one of the group who struck Odo as having any administrative capacity; yet he was more likely to be of use as a pamphleteer than as an office-holder. As to the other philosophers, they were what their name implied: thoughtful and high-minded men, with a generous conception of their civic duties, and a noble readiness to fulfil them at any cost, but untrained to action, and totally ignorant of the complex science of government.

Odo found the hunchback changed. He had withered

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like Trescorre, but under the harsher blight of physical privations; and his tongue had an added bitterness. He replied evasively to all enquiries as to what had become of him during his absence from Pianura; but on Odo's asking for news of Momola and the child he said coldly: "They are both dead."

"Dead?" Odo exclaimed. "Together?"

"There was scarce an hour between them," Gamba answered. "She said she must keep alive as long as the boy needed her—after that she turned on her side and died."

"But of what disorder? How came they to sicken at the same time?"

The hunchback stood silent, his eyes on the ground. Suddenly he raised them and looked full at the Duke.

"Those that saw them called it the plague."

"The plague? Good God!" Odo slowly returned his stare. "Is it possible—" he paused—"that she too was at the feast of the Madonna?"

"She was there, but it was not there that she contracted the distemper."

"Not there—?"

"No; for she dragged herself from her bed to go."

There was another silence. The hunchback had lowered his eyes. The Duke sat motionless, resting his head on his hand. Suddenly he made a gesture of dismissal...

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Two months after his state entry into Pianura Odo married his cousin's widow.

It surprised him, in looking back, to see how completely the thought of Maria Clementina had passed out of his life, how wholly he had ceased to reckon with her as one of the factors in his destiny. At her child's death-bed he had seen in her only the stricken mother, centred in her loss, and recalling, in an agony of tears, the little prince's prophetic vision of the winged playmates who came to him carrying toys from Paradise. After Prince Ferrante's death she had gone on a long visit to her uncle of Monte Alloro; and since her return to Pianura she had lived in the dower-house, refusing Odo's offer of a palace in the town. She had first shown herself to the public on the day of the state entry; and now, her year of widowhood over, she was again the consort of a reigning Duke of Pianura.

No one was more ignorant than her husband of the motives determining her act. As Duchess of Monte Alloro she might have enjoyed the wealth and independence which her uncle's death had bestowed on her, but in marrying again she resigned the right to her new possessions, which became vested in the crown of Pianura. Was it love that had prompted the sacrifice? As she stood beside him on the altar steps of the Cathedral, as she rode home beside him between their shouting subjects, Odo asked himself the question again and

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again. The years had dealt lightly with her, and she had crossed the threshold of the thirties with the assured step of a woman who has no cause to fear what awaits her. But her blood no longer spoke her thoughts, and the transparence of youth had changed to a brilliant density. He could not penetrate beneath the surface of her smile: she seemed to him like a beautiful toy which might conceal a lacerating weapon.

Meanwhile between himself and any better understanding of her stood the remembrance of their talk in the hunting-lodge of Pontesordo. What she had offered then he had refused to take: was she the woman to forget such a refusal? Was it not rather to keep its memory alive that she had married him? Or was she but the flighty girl he had once imagined her, driven hither and thither by spasmodic impulses, and incapable of consistent action, whether for good or ill? The barrier of their past—of all that lay unsaid and undone between them—so completely cut her off from him that he had, in her presence, the strange sensation of a man who believes himself to be alone yet feels that he is watched. . . The first months of their marriage were oppressed by this sense of constraint; but gradually habit bridged the distance between them and he found himself at once nearer to her and less acutely aware of her. In the second year an heir was born and died; and the hopes and grief thus shared drew them

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insensibly into the relation of the ordinary husband and wife, knitted together at the roots in spite of superficial divergencies.

In his passionate need of sympathy and counsel Odo longed to make the most of this enforced community of interests. Already his first zeal was flagging, his belief in his mission wavering: he needed the encouragement of a kindred faith. He had no hope of finding in Maria Clementina that pure passion for justice which seemed to him the noblest ardor of the soul. He had read it in one woman's eyes, but these had long been turned from him. Unconsciously perhaps he counted rather on his wife's less generous qualities: the passion for dominion, the blind arrogance of temper that, for the mere pleasure of making her power felt, had so often drawn her into public affairs. Might not this waste force—which implied, after all, a certain prodigality of courage—be used for good as well as evil? Might not his influence make of the undisciplined creature at his side an unconscious instrument in the great work of order and reconstruction?

His first appeal to her brought the answer. At his request his ministers had drawn up a plan of financial reorganization, which should include the two duchies; for Monte Alloro, though wealthier than Pianura, was in even greater need of fiscal reform. As a first step toward replenishing the treasury the Duke had declared

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himself ready to limit his private expenditure to a fixed sum; and he now asked the Duchess to pledge herself in the same manner. Maria Clementina, since her uncle's death, had been in receipt of a third of the annual revenues of Monte Alloro. This should have enabled her to pay her debts and put some dignity and order into her establishment; but the first year's income had gone in the building of a villa on the Piana, in imitation of the country-seats along the Brenta; the second was spent in establishing a *ménagerie* of wild animals like that of the French Queen at Versailles; and rumor had it that the Duchess carried her imitation of her royal cousin so far as to be involved in an ugly quarrel with her jewellers about a necklace for which she owed a thousand ducats.

All these reports had of course reached Odo; but he still hoped that an appeal to her love of dominion might prove stronger than the habit of self-indulgence. He said to himself that nothing had ever been done to rouse her ambition, that hitherto, if she had meddled in politics, it had been merely from thwarted vanity or the desire to gratify some personal spite. Now he hoped to take her by higher passions, and by associating her with his own schemes to utilize her dormant energies.

For the first moments she listened with the strained fixity of a child; then her attention flickered and died

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out. The life-long habit of referring every question to a personal standpoint made it difficult for her to follow a general argument, and she leaned back with the resigned eyelids of piety under the pulpit. Odo, resolved to be patient, and seeing that the subject was too large for her, tried to take it apart, putting it before her bit by bit, and at such an angle that she should catch her own reflection in it. He thought to take her by the Austrian side, touching on the well-known antagonism between Vienna and Rome, on the reforms of the Tuscan Grand-Duke, on the Emperor Joseph's open defiance of the Church's feudal claims. But she scented a personal application.

"My cousin the Emperor should be a priest himself," she shrugged, "for he belongs to the preaching order. He never goes to France but he gives the poor Queen such a scolding that her eyes are red for a week. Has Joseph been trying to set our house in order?"

Discouraged, but more than ever bent on patience, he tried the chord of vanity, of her love of popularity. The people called her the beautiful Duchess—why not let history name her the great? But the mention of history was unfortunate. It reminded her of her lesson-books, and of the stupid Greeks and Romans, whose dates she could never recall. She hoped she should never be anything as dull as an historical personage! And besides, greatness was for the men—it was enough

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for a princess to be virtuous. And she looked as edifying as her own epitaph.

He caught this up and tried to make her distinguish between the public and the private virtues. But the word *responsibility* slipped from him and he felt her stiffen. This was preaching, and she hated preaching even more than history. Her attention strayed again and he rallied his forces in a last appeal. But he knew it was a lost battle: every argument broke against the close front of her indifference. He was talking a language she had never learned—it was all as remote from her as Church Latin. A princess did not need to know Latin. She let her eye linger suggestively on the clock. It was a fine hunting morning, and she had meant to kill a stag in the Caccia del Vescovo.

When he began to sum up, and the question narrowed to a direct appeal, her eyes left the clock and returned to him. Now she was listening. He pressed on to the matter of retrenchment. Would she join him, would she help to make the great work possible? At first she seemed hardly to understand; but as his meaning grew clear to her—"Is the money no longer ours?" she exclaimed.

He hesitated. "I suppose it is as much ours as ever," he said.

"And how much is that?" she asked impatiently.

"It is ours as a trust for our people."

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She stared in honest wonder. These were new signs in her heaven.

"A trust? A trust? I am not sure that I know what that means. Is the money ours or theirs?"

He hesitated. "In strict honor, it is ours only as long as we spend it for their benefit."

She turned aside to examine an enamelled patch-box by Van Blarenberghe which the court jeweller had newly received from Paris. When she raised her eyes she said: "And if we do not spend it for their benefit—?"

Odo glanced about the room. He looked at the delicate adornment of the walls, the curtains of Lyons damask, the crystal girandoles, the toys in porcelain of Saxony and Sèvres, in bronze and ivory and Chinese lacquer, crowding the tables and cabinets of inlaid wood. Overhead floated a rosy allegory by Luca Giordano; underfoot lay a carpet of the royal manufactory of France; and through the open windows he heard the plash of the garden fountains and saw the alignment of the long green alleys set with the statues of Roman patriots.

"Then," said he—and the words sounded strangely in his own ears—"then they may take it from us some day—and all this with it, to the very toy you are playing with."

She rose, and from her fullest height dropped a brilliant smile on him; then her eyes turned to the portrait

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of the great fighting Duke set in the monumental *stucchi* of the chimney-piece.

"If you take after your ancestors you will know how to defend it," she said.

III

THE new Duke sat in his closet. The walls had been stripped of their pious relics and lined with books, and above the fireplace hung the Venus of Giorgione, liberated at last from her long imprisonment. The windows stood open, admitting the soft September air. Twilight had fallen on the gardens, and through it a young moon floated above the cypresses.

On just such an evening three years earlier he had ridden down the slope of the Monte Baldo with Fulvia Vivaldi at his side. How often, since, he had relived the incidents of that night! With singular precision they succeeded each other in his thoughts. He felt the wild sweep of the storm across the lake, the warmth of her nearness, the sense of her complete trust in him; then their arrival at the inn, the dazzle of light as they crossed the threshold, and de Crucis confronting them within. He heard her voice pleading with him in every accent that pride and tenderness and a noble loyalty could command; he felt her will slowly dominating his, like a supernatural power forcing him into his destined

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path; he felt—and with how profound an irony of spirit!—the passion of self-dedication in which he had taken up his task.

He had known moments of happiness since; moments when he believed in himself and in his calling, and felt himself indeed the man she thought him. That was in the exaltation of the first months, when his opportunities had seemed as boundless as his dreams, and he had not yet learned that the sovereign's power may be a kind of spiritual prison to the man. Since then, indeed, he had known another kind of happiness, had been aware of a secret voice whispering within him that she was right and had chosen wisely for him; but this was when he had realized that he lived in a prison, and had begun to admire the sumptuous adornment of its walls. For a while the mere external show of power amused him, and his imagination was charmed by the historic dignity of his surroundings. In such a setting, against the background of such a past, it seemed easy to play the benefactor and friend of the people. His sensibility was touched by the contrast, and he saw himself as a picturesque figure linking the new dreams of liberty and equality to the feudal traditions of a thousand years. But this masquerading soon ceased to divert him. The round of court ceremonial wearied him, and books and art lost their fascination. The more he varied his amusements the more monotonous they became, the

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more he crowded his life with petty duties the more empty of achievement it seemed.

At first he had hoped to bury his personal disappointments in the task of reconstructing his little state; but on every side he felt a mute resistance to his efforts. The philosophical faction had indeed poured forth pamphlets celebrating his reforms, and comparing his reign to the return of the Golden Age. But it was not for the philosophers that he labored; and the benefits of free speech, a free press, a secular education did not, after all, reach those over whom his heart yearned. It was the people he longed to serve; and the people were hungry, were fever-stricken, were crushed with tithes and taxes. It was hopeless to try to reach them by the diffusion of popular knowledge. They must first be fed and clothed; and before they could be fed and clothed the chains of feudalism must be broken.

Men like Gamba and Andreoni saw this clearly enough; but it was not from them that help could come. The nobility and clergy must be coaxed or coerced into sympathy with the new movement; and to accomplish this exceeded Odo's powers. In France, the revolt from feudalism had found some of its boldest leaders in the very class that had most to lose by the change; but in Italy fewer causes were at work to set such disinterested passions in motion. South of the Alps liberalism was merely one of the new fashions

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from France: the men ran after the pamphlets from Paris as the women ran after the cosmetics; and the politics went no deeper than the powder. Even among the freest intellects liberalism resulted in a new way of thinking rather than in a new way of living. Nowhere among the better classes was there any desire to attack existing institutions. The Church had never troubled the Latin consciousness. The Renaissance had taught cultivated Italians how to live at peace with a creed in which they no longer believed; and their easy-going scepticism was combined with a traditional conviction that the priest knew better than any one how to deal with the poor, and that the clergy were of distinct use in relieving the individual conscience of its obligation to its fellows.

It was against such deep-seated habits of thought that Odo had to struggle. Centuries of fierce individualism, or of sullen apathy under a foreign rule, had left the Italians incapable of any concerted political action; but suspicion, avarice and vanity, combined with a lurking fear of the Church, united all parties in a kind of passive opposition to reform. Thus the Duke's resolve to put the University under lay direction had excited the enmity of the Barnabites, who had been at its head since the suppression of the Society of Jesus; his efforts to partition among the peasantry the Caccia del Vescovo, that great waste domain of the see of Pianura,

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had roused a storm of fear among all who laid claim to feudal rights; and his own personal attempts at retrenchment, which necessitated the suppression of numerous court offices, had done more than anything else to increase his unpopularity. Even the people, in whose behalf these sacrifices were made, looked askance at his diminished state, and showed a perverse sympathy with the dispossessed officials who had taken so picturesque a part in the public ceremonials of the court. All Odo's philosophy could not fortify him against such disillusionments. He felt the lack of Fulvia's unquestioning faith not only in the abstract beauty of the new ideals but in their immediate adaptability to the complex conditions of life. Only a woman's convictions, nourished on sentiment and self-sacrifice, could burn with that clear unwavering flame: his own beliefs were at the mercy of every wind of doubt or ingratitude that blew across his unsheltered sensibilities.

It was more than a year since he had had news of Fulvia. For a while they had exchanged letters, and it had been a consolation to tell her of his struggles and experiments, of his many failures and few results. She had encouraged him to continue the struggle, had analyzed his various plans of reform, and had given her enthusiastic support to the partitioning of the Bishop's fief and the secularization of the University. Her own life, she said, was too uneventful to write of; but she

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spoke of the kindness of her hosts, the Professor and his wife, of the simple unceremonious way of living in the old Calvinist city, and of the number of distinguished persons drawn thither by its atmosphere of intellectual and social freedom.

Odo suspected a certain colorlessness in the life she depicted. The tone of her letters was too uniformly cheerful not to suggest a lack of emotional variety; and he knew that Fulvia's nature, however much she fancied it under the rule of reason, was in reality fed by profound currents of feeling. Something of her old ardor reappeared when she wrote of the possibility of publishing her father's book. Her friends in Geneva, having heard of her difficulty with the Dutch publisher, had undertaken to vindicate her claims; and they had every hope that the matter would be successfully concluded. The joy of renewed activity with which this letter glowed would have communicated itself to Odo had he received it at a different time; but it came on the day of his marriage, and since then he had never written to her.

Now he felt a sudden longing to break the silence between them, and seating himself at his desk he began to write. A moment later there was a knock on the door and one of his gentlemen entered. The Count Vittorio Alfieri, with a dozen horses and as many servants, was newly arrived at the Golden Cross, and desired to

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know when he might have the honor of waiting on his Highness.

Odo felt the sudden glow of pleasure that the news of Alfieri's coming always brought. Here was a friend at last! He forgot the constraint of their last meeting in Florence, and remembered only the happy interchange of ideas and emotions that had been one of the quickening influences of his youth.

Alfieri, in the intervening years, was grown to be one of the foremost figures in Italy. His love for the Countess of Albany, persisting through the vicissitudes of her tragic marriage, had rallied the scattered forces of his nature. Ambitious to excel for her sake, to show himself worthy of such a love, he had at last shaken off the strange torpor of his youth, and revealed himself as the poet for whom Italy waited. In ten months of feverish effort he had poured forth fourteen tragedies —among them the Antigone, the Virginia, and the Conjuration of the Pazzi. Italy started up at the sound of a new voice vibrating with passions she had long since unlearned. Since Filicaja's thrilling appeal to his enslaved country no poet had challenged the old Roman spirit which Petrarch had striven to rouse. While the literati were busy discussing Alfieri's blank verse, while the grammarians wrangled over his syntax and ridiculed his solecisms, the public, heedless of such niceties, was glowing with the new wine which he had

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poured into the old vessels of classic story. *Liberty* was the cry that rang on the lips of all his heroes, in accents so new and stirring that his audience never wearied of its repetition. It was no secret that his stories of ancient Greece and Rome were but allegories meant to teach the love of freedom; yet the Antigone had been performed in the private theatre of the Spanish Ambassador at Rome, the Virginia had been received with applause on the public boards at Turin, and after the usual difficulties with the censorship the happy author had actually succeeded in publishing his plays at Siena. These volumes were already in Odo's hands, and a manuscript copy of the Odes to Free America was being circulated among the liberals in Pianura, and had been brought to his notice by Andreoni.

To those hopeful spirits who looked for the near approach of a happier era, Alfieri was the inspired spokesman of reform, the heaven-sent prophet who was to lead his country out of bondage. The eyes of the Italian reformers were fixed with passionate eagerness on the course of events in England and France. The conclusion of peace between England and America, recently celebrated in Alfieri's fifth Ode, seemed to the most sceptical convincing proof that the rights of man were destined to a speedy triumph throughout the civilized world. It was not of a united Italy that these enthusiasts dreamed. They were not so much patriots

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as philanthropists; for the teachings of Rousseau and his school, while intensifying the love of man for man, had proportionately weakened the sense of patriotism, of the *intérêts du clocher*. The new man prided himself on being a citizen of the world, on sympathizing as warmly with the poetic savage of Peru as with his own prosaic and narrow-minded neighbors. Indeed, the prevalent belief that the savage's mode of life was much nearer the truth than that of civilized Europeans, made it appear superfluous to enter into the grievances and difficulties of what was but a passing phase of human development. To cast off clothes and codes, and live in a peaceful socialism "under the amiable reign of Truth and Nature," seemed on the whole much easier than to undertake the systematic reform of existing abuses.

To such dreamers—whose ideas were those of the majority of intelligent men in France and Italy—Alfieri's high-sounding tirades embodied the noblest of political creeds; and even the soberer judgment of statesmen and men of affairs was captivated by the grandeur of his verse and the heroic audacity of his theme. For the first time in centuries the Italian Muse spoke with the voice of a man; and every man's heart in Italy sprang up at the call.

In the midst of these triumphs, fate in the shape of Cardinal York had momentarily separated Alfieri from

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his mistress, despatching the too-tender Countess to a discreet retreat in Alsace, and signifying to her turbulent adorer that he was not to follow her. Distracted by this prohibition, Alfieri had resumed the nomadic habits of his youth, now wandering from one Italian city to another, now pushing as far as Paris, which he hated but was always revisiting, now dashing across the Channel to buy thoroughbreds in England—for his passion for horses was unabated. He was lately returned from such an expedition, having led his cavalcade across the Alps in person, with a boyish delight in the astonishment which this fantastic exploit excited.

The meeting between the two friends was all that Odo could have wished. Though affecting to scorn the courts of princes, Alfieri was not averse to showing himself there as the poet of the democracy, and to hearing his heroes mouth their tyrannicidal speeches on the boards of royal and ducal stages. He had lately made some stay in Milan, where he had arrived in time to see his Antigone performed before the vice-regal court, and to be enthusiastically acclaimed as the high-priest of liberty by a community living placidly under the Austrian yoke. Alfieri was not the man to be struck by such incongruities. It was his fate to formulate creeds in which he had no faith: to recreate the political ideals of Italy while bitterly opposed to any actual effort at reform, and to be regarded as the mouthpiece

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of the Revolution while he execrated the Revolution with the whole force of his traditional instincts. As usual he was too deeply engrossed in his own affairs to feel much interest in any others; but it was enough for Odo to clasp the hand of the man who had given a voice to the highest aspirations of his countrymen. The poet gave more than he could expect from the friend; and he was satisfied to listen to Alfieri's account of his triumphs, interspersed with bitter diatribes against the public whose applause he courted, and the Pope to whom, on bended knee, he had offered a copy of his plays.

Odo eagerly pressed Alfieri to remain in Pianura, offering to put one of the ducal villas at his disposal, and suggesting that the Virginia should be performed before the court on the Duchess's birthday.

"It is true," he said, "that we can offer you but an indifferent company of actors; but it might be possible to obtain one or two of the leading tragedians from Turin or Milan, so that the principal parts should at least be worthily filled."

Alfieri replied with a contemptuous gesture. "Your Highness, our leading tragedians are monkeys trained to dance to the tune of Goldoni and Metastasio. The best are no better than the worst. We have no tragedians in Italy because—hitherto—we have had no tragic dramatist." He drew himself up and thrust a

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hand in his bosom. "Ah!" he exclaimed, "if I could see the part of Virginia acted by the lady who recently recited, before a small company in Milan, my Odes to Free America! There indeed were fire, sublimity and passion! And the countenance had not lost its freshness, the eye its lustre. But," he suddenly added, "your Highness knows of whom I speak. The lady is Fulvia Vivaldi, the daughter of the philosopher at whose feet we sat in our youth."

Fulvia Vivaldi! Odo raised his head with a start. She had left Geneva then, had returned to Italy. The Alps no longer divided them—a scant day's journey would bring him to her side! It was strange how the mere thought seemed to fill the room with her presence. He felt her in the quickened beat of his pulses, in the sudden lightness of the air, in a lifting and widening of the very bounds of thought.

From Alfieri he learned that she had lived for some months in the household of the distinguished naturalist, Count Castiglione, with whose daughter's education she was charged. In such surroundings her wit and learning could not fail to attract the best company of Milan, and she was become one of the most noted figures of the capital. There had been some talk of offering her the chair of poetry at the Brera; but the report of her liberal views had deterred the faculty. Meanwhile the very fact that she represented the new school of

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thought gave an added zest to her conversation in a society which made up for its mild servitude under the Austrian by much talk of liberalism and independence. The Signorina Vivaldi became the fashion. The literati celebrated her scholarship, the sonneteers her eloquence and beauty; and no foreigner on the grand tour was content to leave Milan without having beheld the fair prodigy and heard her recite Petrarch's Ode to Italy, or the latest elegy of Pindamonte.

Odo scarce knew with what feelings he listened. He could not but acknowledge that such a life was better suited to one of Fulvia's gifts and ambitions than the humdrum existence of a Swiss town; yet his first sensation was one of obscure jealousy, of reluctance to think of her as having definitely broken with the past. He had pictured her as adrift, like himself, on a dark sea of uncertainties; and to learn that she had found a safe anchorage was almost to feel himself deserted.

The court was soon busy with preparations for the coming performance. A celebrated actress from Venice was engaged to play the part of Virginia, and the rehearsals went rapidly forward under the noble author's supervision. At last the great day arrived, and for the first time in the history of the little theatre, operetta and pastoral were replaced by the buskined Muse of tragedy. The court and all the nobility were present, and though it was no longer thought becoming for ec-

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clesiastics to visit the theatre, the easy-going Bishop appeared in a side-box in company with his chaplains and the Vicar-general.

The performance was brilliantly successful. Frantic applause greeted the tirades of the young Icilius. Every outburst against the abuse of privileges and the insolence of the patricians was acclaimed by ministers and courtiers, and the loudest in approval were the Marquess Pievepelago, the recognized representative of the clericals, the Marchioness of Boscofolto, whose harsh enforcement of her feudal rights was among the bitterest grievances of the peasantry, and the good Bishop, who had lately roused himself from his habitual indolence to oppose the threatened annexation of the Caccia del Vescovo. One and all proclaimed their ardent sympathy with the proletariat, their scorn of tyranny and extortion in high places; and if the Marchioness, on her return home, ordered one of her linkmen flogged for having trod on her gown; if Pievepelago the next morning refused to give audience to a poor devil of a pamphleteer that was come to ask his intercession with the Holy Office; if the Bishop at the same moment concluded the purchase of six able-bodied Turks from the galleys of his Serenity the Doge of Genoa—it is probable that, like the illustrious author of the drama, all were unconscious of any incongruity between their sentiments and actions.

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As to Odo, seated in the state box, with Maria Clementina at his side, and the court dignitaries grouped in the background, he had not listened to a dozen lines before all sense of his surroundings vanished and he became the passive instrument on which the poet played his mighty harmonies. All the incidental difficulties of life, all the vacillations of an unsatisfied spirit, were consumed in that energizing emotion which seemed to leave every faculty stripped for action. Profounder meaning and more subtle music he had found in the great poets of the past; but here was an appeal to the immediate needs of the hour, uttered in notes as thrilling as a trumpet-call, and brought home to every sense by the vivid imagery of the stage. Once more he felt the old ardor of belief that Fulvia's nearness had fanned in him. His convictions had flagged rather than his courage: now they started up as at her summons, and he heard the ring of her voice in every line.

He left the theatre still vibrating with this new inrush of life, and jealous of any interruption that should check it. The Duchess's birthday was being celebrated by illuminations and fireworks, and throngs of merry-makers filled the moonlit streets; but Odo, after appearing for a moment at his wife's side on the balcony above the public square, withdrew quietly to his own apartments. The casement of his closet stood wide, and he leaned against the window-frame, looking out on

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the silent radiance of the gardens. As he stood there he saw two figures flit across the farther end of one of the long alleys. The moonlight surrendered them for a moment, the shade almost instantly reclaiming them—strayed revellers, doubtless, escaping from the lights and music of the Duchess's circle.

A knock roused the Duke and he remembered that he had bidden Gamba wait on him after the performance. He had been curious to hear what impression Alfieri's drama had produced upon the hunchback; but now any interruption seemed unwelcome and he turned to Gamba with a gesture of dismissal.

The latter however remained on the threshold.

"Your Highness," he said, "the bookseller Andreoni craves the privilege of an audience."

"Andreoni? At this hour?"

"For reasons so urgent that he makes no doubt of your Highness's consent; and to prove his good faith, and the need of presenting himself at so undue an hour, and in this private manner, he charged me to give this to your Highness."

He laid in the Duke's hand a small object in blackened silver, which on nearer inspection proved to be the ducal coat-of-arms.

Odo stood gazing fixedly at this mysterious token, which seemed to come as an answer to his inmost thoughts. His heart beat high with confused hopes and

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fears, and he could hardly control the voice in which he answered: "Bid Andreoni come to me."

IV

THE bookseller began by excusing himself for the liberty he had taken. He explained that the Signorina Fulvia Vivaldi, in whose behalf he came, was in urgent need of aid, and had begged him to wait on the Duke as soon as the court had risen from the play.

"She is in Pianura, then?" Odo exclaimed.

"Since yesterday, your Highness. Three days since she was ordered by the police to leave Milan within twenty-four hours, and she came at once to Pianura, knowing that my wife and I would gladly receive her. But to-day we learned that the Holy Office was advised of her presence here, and of the reason of her banishment from Lombardy; and this fresh danger has forced her to implore your Highness's protection."

Andreoni went on to explain that the publication of her father's book was the immediate cause of Fulvia's persecution. The Origin of Civilization, which had been printed some months previously in Amsterdam, had stirred Italy more profoundly than any book since Beccaria's great work on Crime and Punishment. The author's historical investigations were but a pretext for the development of his political theories, which were

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set forth with singular daring and audacity, and supported by all the arguments which his long study of the past commanded. The temperate and judicial tone which he had succeeded in preserving enhanced the effect of his arraignment of Church and state, and while his immense erudition commended his work to the learned, its directness of style gave it an immediate popularity with the general reader. It was an age when every book or pamphlet bearing on the great question of personal liberty was eagerly devoured by an insatiable public; and a few weeks after Vivaldi's volume had been smuggled into Italy it was the talk of every club and coffee-house from Calabria to Piedmont. The inevitable result soon followed. The Holy Office got wind of the business, and the book was at once put on the Index. In Naples and Bologna it was publicly burned, and in Modena a professor of the University who was found to have a copy in his possession was fined and removed from his chair.

In Milan, where the strong liberal faction among the nobility, and the comparative leniency of the Austrian rule, permitted a more unrestrained discussion of political questions, the Origin of Civilization was received with open enthusiasm, and the story of the difficulties that Fulvia had encountered in its publication made her the heroine of the moment. She had never concealed her devotion to her father's doctrines, and in the first

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glow of filial pride she may have yielded too openly to the desire to propagate them. Certain it is that she began to be looked on as having shared in the writing of the book, or as being at least an active exponent of its principles. Even in Lombardy it was not well to be too openly associated with the authorship of a condemned book; and Fulvia was suddenly advised by the police that her presence in Milan was no longer acceptable to the government.

The news excited great indignation among her friends, and Count Castiglione and several other gentlemen of rank hastened to intervene in her behalf; but the Governor declared himself unwilling to take issue with the Holy Office on a doctrinal point, and privately added that it would be well for the Signorina Vivaldi to withdraw from Lombardy before the clergy brought any direct charge against her. To ignore this hint would have been to risk not only her own safety but that of the gentlemen who had befriended her; and Fulvia at once set out for Pianura, the only place in Italy where she could count on friendship and protection.

Andreoni and his wife would gladly have given her a home; but on learning that the Holy Office was on her track, she had refused to compromise them by remaining under their roof, and had insisted that Andreoni should wait on the Duke and obtain a safe-conduct for her that very night.

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Odo listened to this story with an agitation compounded of strangely contradictory sensations. To learn that Fulvia, at the very moment when he had pictured her as separated from him by the happiness and security of her life, was in reality a proscribed wanderer with none but himself to turn to, filled him with a confused sense of happiness; but the discovery that, in his own dominions, the political refugee was not safe from the threats of the Holy Office, excited a different emotion. All these considerations, however, were subordinate to the thought that he must see Fulvia at once. It was impossible to summon her to the palace at that hour, or even to secure her safety till morning, without compromising Andreoni by calling attention to the fact that a suspected person was under his roof; and for a moment Odo was at a loss how to detain her in Pianura without seeming to go counter to her wishes.

Suddenly he remembered that Gamba was fertile in expedients, and calling in the hunchback, asked what plan he could devise. Gamba, after a moment's reflection, drew a key from his pocket.

"May it please your Highness," he said, "this unlocks the door of the hunting-lodge at Pontesordo. The place has been deserted these many years, because of its bad name, and I have more than once found it a convenient shelter when I had reasons for wishing to be private. At this season there is no fear of poison

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from the marshes, and if your Highness desires I will see that the lady finds her way there before sunrise."

The sun had hardly risen the next morning when the Duke himself set forth. He rode alone, dressed like one of his own esquires, and gave the word unremarked to the sleepy sentinel at the gate. As it closed behind him and he set out down the long road that led to the chase, it seemed to him that the morning solitude was thronged with spectral memories. Melancholy and fanciful they flitted before him, now in the guise of Cerveno and Momola, now of Maria Clementina and himself. Every detail of the scene was interwoven with the fibres of early association, from the far-off years when, as a lonely child on the farm at Pontesordo, he had gazed across the marsh at the mysterious woodlands of the chase, to the later day when, in the deserted hunting-lodge, the Duchess had flung her whip at the face in the Venice mirror.

He pressed forward impatiently, and presently the lodge rose before him in its grassy solitude. The level sunbeams had not yet penetrated the surrounding palisade of boughs, and the house lay in a chill twilight that seemed an emanation from its mouldering walls. As Odo approached, Gamba appeared from the shadow and took his horse; and the next moment he

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had pushed open the door, and stood in Fulvia's presence.

She was seated at the farther end of the room, and as she rose to meet him it chanced that her head, enveloped in its black travelling-hood, was relieved for a moment against the tarnished background of the broken mirror. The impression struck a chill to his heart; but it was replaced by a glow of boyish happiness as their eyes met and he felt her hands in his.

For a moment all his thoughts were lost in the mere sense of her nearness. She seemed simply an enveloping atmosphere in which he drew fresh breath; but gradually her outline emerged from this haze of feeling, and he found himself looking at her with the wondering gaze of a stranger. She had been a girl of sixteen when they first met. Twelve years had passed since then, and she was now a woman of twenty-eight, belonging to a race in which beauty ripens early and as soon declines. But some happy property of nature—whether the rare mould of her features or the gift of the spirit that informed them—had held her loveliness intact, preserving the clear lines of youth after its bloom was gone, and making her seem like a lover's memory of herself. So she appeared at first, a bright imponderable presence gliding toward him out of the past; but as her hands lay in his the warm current of life was renewed between them, and the woman dispossessed the shade.

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V

UNPUBLISHED FRAGMENT

From MR. ARTHUR YOUNG'S *Diary of his Travels in Italy in the Year 1789.*

OCTOBER 1st. Having agreed with a *vetturino* to carry me to Pianura, set out this morning from Mantua. The country mostly arable, with rows of elm and maple pollard. Dined at Casal Maggiore, in an infamous filthy inn. At dinner was joined by a gentleman who had taken the other seat in the *vettura* as far as Pianura. We engaged in conversation and I found him a man of lively intelligence and the most polished address. Though dressed in the foreign style, *en abbé*, he spoke English with as much fluency as myself, and but for the philosophical tone of his remarks I had taken him for an ecclesiastic. Altogether a striking and somewhat perplexing character: able, keen, intelligent, evidently used to the best company, yet acquainted with the condition of the people, the methods of farming, and other economical subjects such as are seldom thought worthy of attention among Italians of quality.

It appeared he was newly from France, where he had been as much struck as myself by the general state of ferment. Though owning that there was much reason for discontent, and that the conduct of the court and ministers was blind and infatuated beyond belief, he

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yet declared himself gravely apprehensive of the future, saying that the people knew not what they wanted, and were unwilling to listen to those that might have proved their best advisers. Whether by this he meant the clergy I know not; though I observed he spoke favorably of that body in France, pointing out that, long before the recent agitations, they had defended the civil rights of the Third Estate, and citing many cases in which the country curates had shown themselves the truest friends of the people: a fact my own observation hath confirmed.

I remarked to him that I was surprised to find how little talk there was in Italy of the distracted conditions in France; and this though the country is overrun with French refugees, or *émigrés*, as they call themselves, who bring with them reports that might well excite the alarm of neighboring governments. He said he had remarked the same indifference, but that this was consonant with the Italian character, which never looked to the morrow; and he added that the mild disposition of the people, and their profound respect for religion, were sufficient assurance against any political excesses.

To this I could not forbear replying that I could not regard as excesses the just protests of the poor against the unlawful tyranny of the privileged classes, nor forbear to hail with joy the dawn of that light of free-

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dom which hath already shed so sublime an effulgence on the wilds of the New World. The abate took this in good part, though I could see he was not wholly of my way of thinking; but he declared that in his opinion different races needed different laws, and that the sturdy and temperate American colonists were fitted to enjoy a greater measure of political freedom than the more volatile French and Italians—as though liberty were not destined by the Creator to be equally shared by all mankind!*

In the afternoon through a poor country to Ponte di Po, a miserable village on the borders of the duchy, where we lay, not slept, in our clothes, at the worst inn I have yet encountered. Here our luggage was plumbed for Pianura. The impertinence of the petty sovereigns to travellers in Italy is often intolerable, and the customs officers show the utmost insolence in the search for seditious pamphlets and other contraband articles; but here I was agreeably surprised by the courtesy of the officials and the despatch with which our luggage was examined. On my remarking this, my companion replied that the Duke of Pianura was a man of liberal views, anxious to encourage foreigners to visit his state, and the last to put petty obstacles in the way of travel.

*I let this passage stand, though the late unhappy events in France have, alas! proved that my friend the abate was nearer right than myself. June, 1794.

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I answered, this was the report I had heard of him; and it was in the hope of learning something more of the reforms he was said to have effected, that I had turned aside to visit the duchy. My companion replied that his Highness had in fact introduced some innovations in the government; but that changes which seemed the most beneficial in one direction often worked mischief in another, so that the wisest ruler was perhaps not he that did the greatest amount of good, but he that was cause of the fewest evils.

The 2d. From Ponte di Po to Pianura the most convenient way is by water; but the river Piana being greatly swollen by the late rains, my friend, who seems well-acquainted with the country, proposed driving thither: a suggestion I readily accepted, as it gave me a good opportunity to study the roads and farms of the duchy.

Crossing the Piana, drove near four hours over horrible roads across waste land, thinly wooded, without houses or cultivation. On my expressing surprise that the territory of so enlightened a prince should lie thus neglected, the abate said this land was a fief of the see of Pianura, and that the Duke was desirous of annexing it to the duchy. I asked if it were true that his Highness had given his people a constitution modelled on that of the Duke of Tuscany. He said he had heard the report; but that for his part he must deplore

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any measure tending to debar the clergy from the possession of land. Seeing my surprise, he explained that, in Italy at least, the religious orders were far better landlords than the great nobles or the petty sovereigns, who, being for the most part absent from their estates, left their peasantry to be pillaged by rapacious middlemen and stewards: an argument I have heard advanced by other travellers, and have myself had frequent occasion to corroborate.

On leaving the Bishop's domain, remarked an improvement in the roads. Flat land, well irrigated, and divided as usual into small holdings. The pernicious métayer system exists everywhere, but I am told the Duke is opposed to it, though it is upheld not only by the landed class, but by the numerous economists that write on agriculture from their closets, but would doubtless be sorely puzzled to distinguish a beet-root from a turnip.

The 3d. Set out early to visit Pianura. The city clean and well-kept. The Duke has introduced street-lamps, such as are used in Turin, and the pavement is remarkably fair and even. Few beggars are to be seen and the people have a thriving look. Visited the Cathedral and Baptistery, in the Gothic style, more curious than beautiful; also the Duke's picture-gallery.

Learning that the Duchess was to ride out in the afternoon, had the curiosity to walk abroad to see her.

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A good view of her as she left the palace. Though no longer in her first youth she is one of the handsomest women I have seen. Remarked a decided likeness to the Queen of France, though the eye and smile are less engaging. The people in the streets received her sullenly, and I am told her debts and disorders are the scandal of the town. She has, of course, her cicisbeo, and the Duke is the devoted slave of a learned lady, who is said to exert an unlimited influence over him, and to have done much to better the condition of the people. A new part for a prince's mistress to play!

In the evening to the theatre, a handsome building, well-lit with wax, where Cimarosa's Due Baroni was agreeably sung.

The 4th. My Lord Hervey, in Florence, having favored me with a letter to Count Trescorre, the Duke's prime-minister, I waited on that gentleman yesterday. His excellency received me politely and assured me that he knew me by reputation and would do all he could to put me in the way of investigating the agricultural conditions of the duchy. Contrary to the Italian custom, he invited me to dine with him the next day. As a rule these great nobles do not open their doors to foreigners, however well recommended.

Visited, by appointment, the press of the celebrated Andreoni, who was banished during the late Duke's reign for suspected liberal tendencies, but is now re-

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stored to favor and placed at the head of the Royal Typography. Signor Andreoni received me with every mark of esteem, and after having shown me some of the finest examples of his work—such as the Pindar, the Lucretius and the Dante—accompanied me to a neighboring coffee-house, where I was introduced to several lovers of agriculture. Here I learned some particulars of the Duke's attempted reforms. He has undertaken the work of draining the vast marsh of Pontesordo, to the west of the city, notorious for its *mal' aria;* has renounced the monopoly of corn and tobacco; has taken the University out of the hands of the Barnabites, and introduced the teaching of the physical sciences, formerly prohibited by the Church; has spent since his accession near 200,000 liv. on improving the roads throughout the duchy, and is now engaged in framing a constitution which shall deprive the clergy of the greater part of their privileges and confirm the sovereign's right to annex ecclesiastical territory for the benefit of the people.

In spite of these radical measures, his Highness is not popular with the masses. He is accused of irreligion by the monks that he has removed from the University, and his mistress, the daughter of a noted free-thinker who was driven from Piedmont by the Inquisition, is said to have an unholy influence over him. I am told these rumors are diligently fomented by the late Duke's

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minister, now Prior of the Dominican monastery, a man of bigoted views but great astuteness. The truth is, the people are so completely under the influence of the friars that a word is enough to turn them against their truest benefactors.

In the afternoon I was setting out to visit the Bishop's gallery when Count Trescorre's secretary waited on me with an invitation to inspect the estates of the Marchioness of Boscofolto: an offer I readily accepted—for what are the masterpieces of Raphael or Cleomenes to the sight of a good turnip field or of a well-kept dairy?

I had heard of Boscofolto, which was given by the late Duke to his mistress, as one of the most productive estates of the duchy; but great was my disappointment on beholding it. Fine gardens there are, to be sure, clipt walks, leaden statues, and water-works; but as for the farms, all is dirt, neglect, disorder. Spite of the lady's wealth, all are let out *alla metà*, and farmed on principles that would disgrace a savage. The spade used instead of the plough, the hedges neglected, mole-casts in the pastures, good land run to waste, the peasants starving and indebted—where, with a little thrift and humanity, all had been smiling plenty! Learned that on the owner's death this great property reverts to the Barnabites.

From Boscofolto to the church of the Madonna del Monte, where is one of their wonder-working images,

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said to be annually visited by close on thirty thousand pilgrims; but there is always some exaggeration in such figures. A fine building, richly adorned, and hung with an extraordinary number of votive offerings: silver arms, legs, hearts, wax images, and paintings. Some of these latter are clearly the work of village artists, and depict the miraculous escape of the peasantry from various calamities, and the preservation of their crops from floods, drought, lightning and so forth. These poor wretches had done more to better their crops by spending their savings in good ploughshares and harrows than by hanging gew-gaws on a wooden idol.

The Rector received us civilly and showed us the treasury, full of jewels and costly plate, and the buildings where the pilgrims are lodged. Learned that the *Giubileo* or centenary festival of the Madonna is shortly to be celebrated with great pomp. The poorer classes delight in these ceremonies, and I am told this is to surpass all previous ones, the clergy intending to work on the superstitions of the people and thus turn them against the new charter. It is said the Duke hopes to counteract these designs by offering a jewelled diadem to the Virgin; but this will no doubt do him a bad turn with the *esprits libres*. These little states are as full of intrigues as a foul fruit of maggots.

The 5th. To dinner at Count Trescorre's, where, as

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usual, I was the plainest-dressed man in the company. Have long since ceased to be concerned by this: why should a mere English farmer compete in elegance with these *Monsignori* and *Illustrissimi?* Surprised to find among the company my travelling-companion of the other day. Learned that he is the abate de Crucis, a personal friend of the Duke's. He greeted me cordially, and on hearing my name, said that he was acquainted with my works in the translation of Mons. Fréville, and now understood how it was that I had got the better of him in our farming disputations on the way hither.

Was surprised to be told by Count Trescorre that the Duke desired me to wait on him that evening. Though in general not ambitious of such honors, yet in this case nothing could be more gratifying.

The 6th. Yesterday evening to the palace, where his Highness received me with great affability. He was in his private apartments, with the abate de Crucis and several other learned men; among them the famous abate Crescenti, librarian to his Highness and author of the celebrated Chronicles of the Italian States. Happy indeed is the prince who surrounds himself with scholars instead of courtiers! Yet I cannot say that the impression his Highness produced on me was one of *happiness.* His countenance is sad, almost careworn, though with a smile of engaging sweetness; his manner affable without condescension, and open without familiarity. I am

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told he is oppressed by the cares of his station; and from a certain irresolution of voice and eye, that bespeaks not so much weakness as a speculative cast of mind, I can believe him less fitted for active government than for the meditations of the closet. He appears, however, zealous to perform his duties; questioned me eagerly about my impressions of Italy, and showed a flattering familiarity with my works, and a desire to profit by what he was pleased to call my exceptional knowledge of agriculture. I thought I perceived in him a sincere wish to study the welfare of his people; but was disappointed to find among his chosen associates not one practical farmer or economist, but only the usual closet-theorists that are too busy planning Utopias to think of planting turnips.

The 7th. Visited his Highness's estate at Valsecca. Here he has converted a handsome seat into a school of agriculture, tearing down an immense orangery to plant mulberries, and replacing costly gardens and statuary by well-tilled fields: a good example to his wealthy subjects. Unfortunately his bailiff is not what we should call a practical farmer; and many acres of valuable ground are given up to a botanic garden, where exotic plants are grown at great expense, and rather for curiosity than use: a common error of noble agriculturists.

In the afternoon with the abate de Crucis to the

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Benedictine monastery a league beyond the city. Here I saw the best farming in the duchy. The Prior received us politely and conversed with intelligence on drainage, crops and irrigation. I urged on him the cultivation of turnips and he appeared struck by my arguments. The tenants on this great estate appeared better housed and fed than any I have seen in Pianura. The monks have a school of agriculture, less pretentious but better-managed than the Duke's. Some of them study physics and chemistry, and there are good chirurgeons among them, who care for the poor without pay. The aged and infirm peasants are housed in a neat almshouse, and the sick nursed in a clean well-built lazaret. Altogether an agreeable picture of rural prosperity, though I had rather it had been the result of *free labor* than of *monastic bounty*.

The 8th. By appointment, to the Duke's Egeria. This lady, the Signorina F. V., having heard that I was in Pianura, had desired the Signor Andreoni to bring me to her.

I had expected a female of the loud declamatory type: something of the Corilla Olimpica order; but in this was agreeably disappointed. The Signorina V. is modestly lodged, lives in the frugal style of the middle class, and refuses to accept a title, though she is thus debarred from going to court. Were it not indiscreet to speculate on a lady's age, I should put hers at some-

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what above thirty. Though without the Duchess's commanding elegance she has, I believe, more beauty of a quiet sort: a countenance at once soft and animated, agreeably tinged with melancholy, yet lit up by the incessant play of thought and emotion that succeed each other in her talk. Better conversation I never heard; and can heartily confirm the assurances of those who had told me that the lady was as agreeable in discourse as learned in the closet.*

On entering, found a numerous company assembled to compliment my hostess on her recent appointment as doctor of the University. This is an honor not uncommonly conferred in Italy, where female learning, perhaps from its rarity, is highly esteemed; but I am told the ladies thus distinguished seldom speak in public, though their degree entitles them to a chair in the University. In the Signorina V.'s society I found the most advanced reformers of the duchy: among others Signor Gamba, the famous pamphleteer, author of a remarkable treatise on taxation, which had nearly cost him his liberty under the late Duke's reign. He is a man of extreme views and sarcastic tongue, with an irritability of manner that is perhaps the result of

* It has before now been observed that the *free* and *volatile* manners of foreign ladies tend to blind the English traveller to the inferiority of their *physical* charms. Note by a Female Friend of the Author.

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bodily infirmities. His ideas, I am told, have much weight with the fair doctoress; and in the lampoons of the day the new constitution is said to be the offspring of their amours, and to have inherited its father's deformity.

The company presently withdrawing, my hostess pressed me to remain. She was eager for news from France, spoke admiringly of the new constitution, and recited in a moving manner an Ode of her own composition on the Fall of the Bastille. Though living so retired she makes no secret of her connection with the Duke; said he had told her of his conversation with me, and asked what I thought of his plan for draining the marsh of Pontesordo. On my attempting to reply to this in detail, I saw that, like some of the most accomplished of her sex, she was impatient of *minutiæ*, and preferred general ideas to particular instances; but when the talk turned on the rights of the people I was struck by the energy and justice of her remarks, and by a tone of resolution and courage that made me say to myself: *Here is the hand that rules the state.*

She questioned me earnestly about the state of affairs in France, begged me to lend her what pamphlets I could procure, and while making no secret of her republican sympathies, expressed herself with a moderation not always found in her sex. Of the clergy alone she appeared intolerant: a fact hardly to be wondered at,

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considering the persecutions to which she and her father have been subjected. She detained me near two hours in such discourse, and on my taking leave asked with some show of feeling what I, as a practical economist, would advise the Duke to do for the benefit of his people; to which I replied, "Plant turnips, madam!" and she laughed heartily, and said no doubt I was right. But I fear all the heads here are too full of fine theories to condescend to such simple improvements. . .

. . . . . .

VI

FULVIA, in the twilight, sat awaiting the Duke.

The room in which she sat looked out on a stone-flagged cloister enclosing a plot of ground planted with yews; and at the farther end of this cloister a door communicated by a covered way with the ducal gardens. The house had formed a part of the convent of the Perpetual Adoration, which had been sold by the nuns when they moved to the new buildings the late Duke had given them. A portion had been torn down to make way for the Marquess of Cerveno's palace, and in the remaining fragment, a low building wedged between high walls, Fulvia had found a lodging. Her whole dwelling consisted of the Abbess's parlor, in which she now sat, and the two or three ad-

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joining cells. The tall presses in the parlor had been filled with her father's books, and surmounted by his globes and other scientific instruments. But for this the apartment remained as unadorned as in her predecessor's day; and Fulvia, in her austere black gown, with a lawn kerchief folded over her breast, and the unpowdered hair drawn back from her pale face, might herself have passed for the head of a religious community.

She cultivated with almost morbid care this severity of dress and surroundings. There were moments when she could hardly tolerate the pale autumnal beauty which her glass reflected, when even this phantom of youth and radiance became a stumbling-block to her spiritual pride. She was not ashamed of being the Duke of Pianura's mistress; but she had a horror of being thought like the mistresses of other princes. She loathed all that the position represented in men's minds; she had refused all that, according to the conventions of the day, it entitled her to claim: wealth, patronage, and the rank and estates which it was customary for the sovereign to confer. She had taken nothing from Odo but his love, and the little house in which he had lodged her.

Three years had passed since Fulvia's flight to Pianura. From the moment when she and Odo had stood face to face again, it had been clear to him that he

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could never give her up, to her that she could never leave him. Fate seemed to have thrown them together in derision of their long struggle, and both felt that lassitude of the will which is the reaction from vain endeavor. The discovery that he needed her, that the task for which he had given her up could after all not be accomplished without her, served to overcome her last resistance. If the end for which both strove could best be attained together—if he needed the aid of her unfaltering faith as much as she needed that of his wealth and power—why should any personal scruple stand between them? Why should she who had given all else to the cause—ease, fortune, safety, and even the happiness that lay in her hand—hesitate to make the final sacrifice of a private ideal? According to the standards of her day there was no dishonor to a woman in being the mistress of a man whose rank forbade his marrying her: the dishonor lay in the conduct which had come to be associated with such relations. Under the old dispensation the influence of the prince's mistress had stood for the last excesses of moral and political corruption; why might it not, under the new law, come to represent as unlimited a power for good?

So love, the casuist, argued; and during those first months, when happiness seemed at last its own justification, Fulvia lived in every fibre. But always, even

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then, she was on the defensive against that higher tribunal which her own conception of life had created. In spite of herself she was a child of the new era, of the universal reaction against the falseness and egotism of the old social code. A standard of conduct regulated by the needs of the race rather than by individual passion, a conception of each existence as a link in the great chain of human endeavor, had slowly shaped itself out of the wild theories and vague "codes" of the eighteenth-century moralists; and with this sense of the sacramental nature of human ties, came a renewed reverence for moral and physical purity.

Fulvia was of those who require that their lives shall be an affirmation of themselves; and the lack of inner harmony drove her to seek some outward expression of her ideals. She threw herself with renewed passion into the political struggle. The best, the only justification of her power, was to use it boldly, openly, for the good of the people. All the repressed forces of her nature were poured into this single channel. She had no desire to conceal her situation, to disguise her influence over Odo. She wished it rather to be so visible a factor in his relations with his people that she should come to be regarded as the ultimate pledge of his good faith. But, like all the casuistical virtues, this position had the rigidity of something created to fit a special case; and the result was a fixity of vision, a tension of attitude,

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which spread benumbingly over her whole nature. She was conscious of the change, yet dared not struggle against it, since to do so was to confess the weakness of her case. She had chosen to be regarded as a symbol rather than a woman, and there were moments when she felt as isolated from life as some marble allegory in its niche above the market-place.

It was the desire to associate herself with the Duke's public life that had induced her, after much hesitation, to accept the degree which the University had conferred on her. She had shared eagerly in the work of reconstructing the University, and had been the means of drawing to Pianura several teachers of distinction from Padua and Pavia. It was her dream to build up a seat of learning which should attract students from all parts of Italy; and though many young men of good family had withdrawn from the classes when the Barnabites were dispossessed, she was confident that these would soon be replaced by scholars from other states. She was resolved to identify herself openly with the educational reform which seemed to her one of the most important steps toward civic emancipation; and she had therefore acceded to the request of the faculty that, on receiving her degree, she should sustain a thesis before the University. This ceremony was to take place a few days hence, on the Duke's birthday; and, as the new charter was to be proclaimed on the same day, Fulvia had

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chosen as the subject of her discourse the Constitution recently promulgated in France.

She pushed aside the bundle of political pamphlets which she had been studying, and sat looking out at the strip of garden beyond the arches of the cloister. The narrow horizon bounded by convent walls symbolized fitly enough the life she had chosen to lead: a life of artificial restraints and renunciations, passive, conventual almost, in which even the central point of her love burned, now, with a calm devotional glow.

The door in the cloister opened and the Duke crossed the garden. He walked slowly, with the listless step she had observed in him of late; and as he entered she saw that he looked pale and weary.

"You have been at work again," she said. "A cabinet-meeting?"

"Yes," he answered, sinking into the Abbess's high carved chair.

He glanced musingly about the dim room, in which the shadow of the cloister made an early dusk. Its atmosphere of monastic calm, of which the significance did not escape him, fell soothingly on his spirit. It simplified his relation to Fulvia by tacitly restricting it within the bounds of a tranquil tenderness. Any other setting would have seemed less in harmony with their fate.

Better, perhaps, than Fulvia, he knew what ailed them both. Happiness had come to them, but it had

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come too late; it had come tinged with disloyalty to their early ideals; it had come when delay and disillusionment had imperceptibly weakened the springs of passion. For it is the saddest thing about sorrow that it deadens the capacity for happiness; and to Fulvia and Odo the joy they had renounced had returned with an exile's alien face.

Seeing that he remained silent, she rose and lit the shaded lamp on the table. He watched her as she moved across the room. Her step had lost none of its flowing grace, of that harmonious impetus which years ago had drawn his boyish fancy in its wake. As she bent above the lamp, the circle of light threw her face into relief against the deepening shadows of the room. She had changed, indeed, but as those change in whom the springs of life are clear and abundant: it was a development rather than a diminution. The old purity of outline remained; and deep below the surface, but still visible sometimes to his lessening insight, the old girlish spirit, radiant, tender and impetuous, stirred for a moment in her eyes.

The lamplight fell on the pamphlets she had pushed aside. Odo picked one up. "What are these?" he asked.

"They were sent to me by the English traveller whom Andreoni brought here."

He turned a few pages. "The old story," he said. "Do you never weary of it?"

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"An old story?" she exclaimed. "I thought it had been the newest in the world. Is it not being written, chapter by chapter, before our very eyes?"

Odo laid the treatise aside. "Are you never afraid to turn the next page?" he asked.

"Afraid? Afraid of what?"

"That it may be written in blood."

She uttered a quick exclamation; then her face hardened, and she said in a low tone: "De Crucis has been with you."

He made the half-resigned, half-impatient gesture of the man who feels himself drawn into a familiar argument from which there is no issue.

"He left yesterday for Germany."

"He was here too long!" she said, with an uncontrollable escape of bitterness.

Odo sighed. "If you would but let me bring him to you, you would see that his influence over me is not what you think it."

She was silent a moment; then she said: "You are tired to-night. Let us not talk of these things."

"As you please," he answered, with an air of relief; and she rose and went to the harpsichord.

She played softly, with a veiled touch, gliding from one crepuscular melody to another, till the room was filled with drifts of sound that seemed like the voice of its own shadows. There had been times when he could

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have yielded himself to this languid tide of music, letting it loosen the ties of thought till he floated out into the soothing dimness of sensation; but now the present held him. To Fulvia, too, he knew the music was but a forced interlude, a mechanical refuge from thought. She had deliberately narrowed their intercourse to one central idea; and it was her punishment that silence had come to be merely an intensified expression of this idea.

When she turned to Odo she saw the same consciousness in his face. It was useless for them to talk of other things. With a pang of unreasoning regret she felt that she had become to him the embodiment of a single thought—a formula, rather than a woman.

"Tell me what you have been doing," she said.

The question was a relief. At once he began to speak of his work. All his thoughts, all his time, were given to the constitution which was to define the powers of Church and state. The difficulties increased as the work advanced; but the gravest difficulty was one of which he dared not tell her: his own growing distrust of the ideas for which he labored. He was too keenly aware of the difference in their mental operations. With Fulvia, ideas were either rejected or at once converted into principles; with himself, they remained stored in the mind, serving rather as commentaries on life than as incentives to action. This perpetual accessibility to

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new impressions was a quality she could not understand, or could conceive of only as a weakness. Her own mind was like a garden in which nothing is ever transplanted. She allowed for no intermediate stages between error and dogma, for no shifting of the bounds of conviction; and this security gave her the singleness of purpose in which he found himself more and more deficient.

Odo remembered that he had once thought her nearness would dispel his hesitations. At first it had been so; but gradually the contact with her fixed enthusiasms had set up within him an opposing sense of the claims she ignored. The element of dogmatism in her faith showed the discouraging sameness of the human mind. He perceived that to a spirit like Fulvia's it might become possible to shed blood in the cause of tolerance.

The rapid march of events in France had necessarily produced an opposite effect on minds so differently constituted. To Fulvia the year had been a year of victory, a glorious affirmation of her political creed. Step by step she had seen, as in some old allegorical painting, error fly before the shafts of truth. Where Odo beheld a conflagration she saw a sunrise; and all that was bare and cold in her own life was warmed and transfigured by that ineffable brightness.

She listened patiently while he enlarged on the diffi-

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culties of the case. The constitution was framed in all its details, but with its completion he felt more than ever doubtful of the wisdom of granting it. He would have welcomed any postponement that did not seem an admission of fear. He dreaded the inevitable break with the clergy, not so much because of the consequent danger to his own authority, as because he was increasingly conscious of the newness and clumsiness of the instrument with which he proposed to replace their tried and complex system. He mentioned to Fulvia the rumors of popular disaffection; but she swept them aside with a smile.

"The people mistrust you," she said. "And what does that mean? That you have given your enemies time to work on their credulity. The longer you delay the more opposition you will encounter. Father Ignazio would rather destroy the state than let it be saved by any hand but his."

Odo reflected. "Of all my enemies," he said, "Father Ignazio is the one I most respect, because he is the most sincere."

"He is the most dangerous, then," she returned. "A fanatic is always more powerful than a knave."

He was struck with her undiminished faith in the sufficiency of such generalizations. Did she really think that to solve such a problem it was only necessary to define it? The contact with her unfaltering assurance

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would once have given him a momentary glow; but now it left him cold.

She was speaking more urgently. "Surely," she said, "the noblest use a man can make of his own freedom is to set others free. My father said it was the only justification of kingship."

He glanced at her half-sadly. "Do you still fancy that kings are free? I am bound hand and foot."

"So was my father," she flashed back at him; "but he had the Promethean spirit."

She colored at her own quickness, but Odo took the thrust tranquilly.

"Yes," he said, "your father had the Promethean spirit: I have not. The flesh that is daily torn from me does not grow again."

"Your courage is as great as his," she exclaimed, her tenderness in arms.

"No," he answered, "for his was hopeful." There was a pause, and then he began to speak of the day's work.

All the afternoon he had been in consultation with Crescenti, whose vast historical knowledge was of service in determining many disputed points in the tenure of land. The librarian was in sympathy with any measures tending to relieve the condition of the peasantry; yet he was almost as strongly opposed as Trescorre to any reproduction of the Tuscan constitution.

"He is afraid!" broke from Fulvia. She admired and

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respected Crescenti, yet she had never fully trusted him. The taint of ecclesiasticism was on him.

Odo smiled. "He has never been afraid of facing the charge of Jansenism," he replied. "All his life he has stood in open opposition to the Church party."

"It is one thing to criticise their dogmas, another to attack their privileges. At such a time he is bound to remember that he is a priest—that he is one of them."

"Yet, as you have often pointed out, it is to the clergy that France in great measure owes her release from feudalism."

She smiled coldly. "France would have won her cause without the clergy!"

"This is not France, then," he said with a sigh. After a moment he began again: "Can you not see that any reform which aims at reducing the power of the clergy must be more easily and successfully carried out if they can be induced to take part in it? That, in short, we need them at this moment as we have never needed them before? The example of France ought at least to show you that."

"The example of France shows me that, to gain a point in such a struggle, any means must be used! In France, as you say, the clergy were with the people—here they are against them. Where persuasion fails coercion must be used!"

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Odo smiled faintly. "You might have borrowed that from their own armory," he said.

She colored at the sarcasm. "Why not?" she retorted. "Let them have a taste of their own methods! They know the kind of pressure that makes men yield—when they feel it they will know what to do."

He looked at her with astonishment. "This is Gamba's tone," he said. "I have never heard you speak in this way before."

She colored again; and now with a profound emotion. "Yes," she said, "it is Gamba's tone. He and I speak for the same cause and with the same voice. We are of the people and we speak for the people. Who are your other counsellors? Priests and noblemen! It is natural enough that they should wish to make their side of the question heard. Listen to them, if you will—conciliate them, if you can! We need all the allies we can win. Only do not fancy they are really speaking for the people. Do not think it is the people's voice you hear. The people do not ask you to weigh this claim against that, to look too curiously into the defects and merits of every clause in their charter. All they ask is that the charter should be given them!"

She spoke with the low-voiced passion that possessed her at such moments. All acrimony had vanished from her tone. The expression of a great conviction had swept aside every personal animosity, and cleared the

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sources of her deepest feeling. Odo felt the pressure of her emotion. He leaned to her and their hands met.

"It shall be given them," he said.

She lifted her face to his. It shone with a great light. Once before he had seen it so illumined, but with how different a brightness! The remembrance stirred in him some old habit of the senses. He bent over and kissed her.

VII

NEVER before had Odo so keenly felt the difference between theoretical visions of liberty and their practical application. His deepest heart-searchings showed him as sincerely devoted as ever to the cause which had enlisted his youth. He still longed above all things to serve his fellows; but the conditions of such service were not what he had dreamed. How different a calling it had been in Saint Francis's day, when hearts inflamed with the new sense of brotherhood had but to set forth on their simple mission of almsgiving and admonition! To love one's neighbor had become a much more complex business, one that taxed the intelligence as much as the heart, and in the course of which feeling must be held in firm subjection to reason. He was discouraged by Fulvia's inability to understand the change. Hers was the missionary spirit; and he could

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not but reflect how much happier she would have been as a nun in a charitable order, a unit in some organized system of beneficence.

He too would have been happier to serve than to command! But it is not given to the lovers of the Lady Poverty to choose their special rank in her household. Don Gervaso's words came back to him with deepening significance, and he thought how truly the old chaplain's prayer had been fulfilled. Honor and power had come to him, and they had abased him to the dust. The *Humilitas* of his fathers, woven, carved and painted on every side, pursued him with an ironical reminder of his impotence.

Fulvia had not been mistaken in attributing his depression of spirit to de Crucis's visit. It was the first time that de Crucis had returned to Pianura since the new Duke's accession. Odo had welcomed him eagerly, had again pressed him to remain; but de Crucis was on his way to Germany, bound on some business which could not be deferred. Odo, aware of the renewed activity of the Jesuits, supposed that this business was connected with the flight of the French refugees, many of whom were gone to Coblentz; but on this point the abate was silent. Of the state of affairs in France he spoke openly and despondently. The immoderate haste with which the reforms had been granted filled him with fears for the future. Odo knew that Crescenti

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shared these fears, and the judgment of these two men, with whom he differed on fundamental principles, weighed with him far more than the opinions of the party he was supposed to represent. But he was in the case of many greater sovereigns of his day. He had set free the waters of reform, and the frail bark of his authority had been torn from its moorings and swept headlong into the central current.

The next morning, to his surprise, the Duchess sent one of her gentlemen to ask an audience. Odo at once replied that he would wait on her Highness; and a few moments later he was ushered into his wife's closet.

She had just left her toilet, and was still in the morning négligée worn during that prolonged and public ceremonial. Freshly perfumed and powdered, her eyes bright, her lips set in a nervous smile, she curiously recalled the arrogant child who had snatched her spaniel away from him years ago in that same room. And was she not that child, after all? Had she ever grown beyond the imperious instincts of her youth? It seemed to him now that he had judged her harshly in the first months of their marriage. He had felt a momentary impatience when he had tried to force her roving impulses into the line of his own endeavor: it was easier to view her leniently now that she had almost passed out of his life.

He wondered why she had sent for him. Some dis-

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pute with her household, doubtless; a quarrel with a servant, even—or perhaps some sordid difficulty with her creditors. But she began in a new key.

"Your Highness," she said, "is not given to taking my advice."

Odo looked at her in surprise. "The opportunity is not often accorded me," he replied with a smile.

Maria Clementina made an impatient gesture; then her face softened. Contradictory emotions flitted over it like the reflections cast by a hurrying sky. She came close to him and then drew away and seated herself in the high-backed chair where she had throned when he first saw her. Suddenly she blushed and began to speak.

"Once," she said in a low, almost inaudible voice, "I was able to give your Highness warning of an impending danger—" She paused and her eyes rested full on Odo.

He felt his color rise as he returned her gaze. It was her first allusion to the past. He had supposed she had forgotten. For a moment he remained awkwardly silent.

"Do you remember?" she asked.

"I remember."

"The danger was a grave one. Your Highness may recall that but for my warning you would not have been advised of it."

"I remember," he said again.

She paused a moment. "The danger," she repeated,

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"was a grave one; but it threatened only your Highness's person. Your Highness listened to me then; will you listen again if I advise you of a greater—a peril threatening not only your person but your throne?"

Odo smiled. He could guess now what was coming. She had been drilled to act as the mouthpiece of the opposition. He composed his features and said quietly: "These are grave words, madam. I know of no such peril—but I am always ready to listen to your Highness."

His smile had betrayed him, and a quick flame of anger passed over her face.

"Why should you listen to me, since you never heed what I say?"

"Your Highness has just reminded me that I did so once—"

"Once!" she repeated bitterly. "You were younger then—and so was I!" She glanced at herself in the mirror with a dissatisfied laugh. Something in her look and movement touched the springs of compassion.

"Try me again," he said gently. "If I am older, perhaps I am also wiser, and therefore even more willing to be guided."

"Oh," she caught him up with a sneer, "you are willing enough to be guided—we all know that." She broke off, as though she felt her mistake and wished to make a fresh beginning. Again her face was full of

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fluctuating meaning; and he saw, beneath its shallow surface, the eddy of incoherent impulses. When she spoke, it was with a noble gravity.

"Your Highness," she said, "does not take me into your counsels; but it is no secret at court and in the town that you have in contemplation a grave political measure."

"I have made no secret of it," he replied.

"No—or I should be the last to know it!" she exclaimed, with one of her sudden lapses into petulance.

Odo made no reply. Her futility was beginning to weary him. She saw it and again attempted an impersonal dignity of manner.

"It has been your Highness's choice," she said, "to exclude me from public affairs. Perhaps I was not fitted by education or intelligence to share in the cares of government. Your Highness will at least bear witness that I have scrupulously respected your decision, and have never attempted to intrude upon your counsels."

Odo bowed. It would have been useless to remind her that he had sought her help and failed to obtain it.

"I have accepted my position," she continued. "I have led the life to which it has pleased your Highness to restrict me. But I have not been able to detach my heart as well as my thoughts from your Highness's interests. I have not learned to be indifferent to your danger."

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Odo looked up quickly. She ceased to interest him when she spoke by the book, and he was impatient to make an end.

"You spoke of danger before," he said. "What danger?"

"That of forcing on your subjects liberties which they do not desire!"

"Ah," said he thoughtfully. That was all, then. What a poor tool she made! He marvelled that, in all these years, Trescorre's skilful hands should not have fashioned her to better purpose.

"Your Highness," he said, "has reminded me that since our marriage you have lived withdrawn from public affairs. I will not pause to dispute by whose choice this has been; I will in turn merely remind your Highness that such a life does not afford much opportunity of gauging public opinion."

In spite of himself a note of sarcasm had again crept into his voice; but to his surprise she did not seem to resent it.

"Ah," she exclaimed, with more feeling than she had hitherto shown, "you fancy that because I am kept in ignorance of what you think I am ignorant also of what others think of you! Believe me," she said, with a flash of insight that startled him, "I know more of you than if we stood closer. But you mistake my purpose. I have not sent for you to force my counsels on you. I have no

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desire to appear ridiculous. I do not ask you to hear what *I* think of your course, but what others think of it."

"What others?"

The question did not disconcert her. "Your subjects," she said quickly.

"My subjects are of many classes."

"All are of one class in resenting this charter. I am told you intend to proclaim it within a few days. I entreat you at least to delay, to reconsider your course. Oh, believe me when I say you are in danger! Of what use to offer a crown to our Lady, when you have it in your heart to slight her servants? But I will not speak of the clergy, since you despise them—nor of the nobles, since you ignore their claims. I will speak only of the people—the people, in whose interest you profess to act. Believe me, in striking at the Church you wound the poor. It is not their bodily welfare I mean —though Heaven knows how many sources of bounty must now run dry! It is their faith you insult. First you turn them against their masters, then against their God. They may acclaim you for it now—but I tell you they will hate you for it in the end!"

She paused, flushed with the vehemence of her argument, and eager to press it farther. But her last words had touched an unexpected fibre in Odo. He looked at her with his unseeing visionary gaze.

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"The end?" he murmured. "Who knows what the end will be?"

"Do you still need to be told?" she exclaimed. "Must you always come to me to learn that you are in danger?"

"If the state is in danger the danger must be faced. The state exists for the people; if they do not need it, it has ceased to serve its purpose."

She clasped her hands in an ecstasy of wonder. "Oh, fool, madman—but it is not of the state I speak! It is you who are in danger—you—you—you—"

He raised his head with an impatient gesture.

"I?" he said. "I had thought you meant a graver peril."

She looked at him in silence. Her pride met his and thrilled with it; and for a moment the two were one.

"Odo!" she cried. She sank into a chair, and he went to her and took her hand.

"Such fears are worthy neither of us," he said gravely.

"I am not ashamed of them," she said. Her hand clung to him and she lifted her eyes to his face. "You will listen to me?" she whispered in a glow.

He drew back chilled. If only she had kept the feminine in abeyance! But sex was her only weapon.

"I have listened," he said quietly. "And I thank you."

"But you will not be counselled?"

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"In the last issue one must be one's own counsellor."

Her face flamed. "If you were but that!" she tossed back at him.

The taunt struck him full. He knew that he should have let it lie; but he caught it up in spite of himself.

"Madam!" he said.

"I should have appealed to our sovereign, not to her servant!" she cried, dashing into the breach she had made.

He stood motionless, stunned almost. For what she had said was true. He was no longer the sovereign: the rule had passed out of his hands.

His silence frightened her. With an instinctive jealousy she saw that her words had started a train of thought in which she had no part. She felt herself ignored, abandoned; and all her passions rushed to the defence of her wounded vanity.

"Oh, believe me," she cried, "I speak as your Duchess, not as your wife. That is a name in which I should never dream of appealing to you. I have ever stood apart from your private pleasures, as became a woman of my house." She faced him with a flash of the Austrian insolence. "But when I see the state drifting to ruin as the result of your caprice, when I see your own life endangered, your people turned against you, religion openly insulted, law and authority made the plaything of this—this—false atheistical creature, that has

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robbed me—robbed me of all—" She broke off helplessly and hid her face with a sob.

Odo stood speechless, spell-bound. He could not mistake what had happened. The woman had surged to the surface at last—the real woman, passionate, self-centred, undisciplined, but so piteous, after all, in this sudden subjection to the one tenderness that survived in her. She loved him and was jealous of her rival. That was the instinct which had swept all others aside. At that moment she cared nothing for her own safety or his. The state might perish if they but fell together. It was the distance between them that maddened her.

The tragic simplicity of the revelation left Odo silent. For a fantastic moment he yielded to the vision of what that waste power might have accomplished. Life seemed to him a confusion of roving forces that met only to crash in ruins.

His silence drew her to her feet. She repossessed herself, throbbing but valiant.

"My fears for your Highness's safety have led my speech astray. I have given your Highness the warning it was my duty to give. Beyond that I had no thought of trespassing."

And still Odo was silent. A dozen answers struggled to his lips; but they were checked by the stealing sense of duality that so often paralyzed his action. He had recovered his lucidity of vision, and his impulses faded

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before it like mist. He saw life again as it was, an incomplete and shabby business, a patchwork of torn and ravelled effort. Everywhere the shears of Atropos were busy, and never could the cut threads be joined again.

He took his wife's hand and bent over it ceremoniously. It lay in his like a stone.

VIII

THE jubilee of the Mountain Madonna fell on the feast of the Purification. It was mid-November, but with a sky of June. The autumn rains had ceased for the moment, and fields and orchards glistened with a late verdure.

Never had the faithful gathered in such numbers to do honor to the wonder-working Virgin. A widespread resistance to the influences of free thought and Jansenism was pouring fresh life into the old formulas of devotion. Though many motives combined to strengthen this movement, it was still mainly a simple expression of loyalty to old ideals, an instinctive rallying around a threatened cause. It is the honest conviction underlying all great popular impulses that gives them their real strength; and in this case the thousands of pilgrims flocking on foot to the mountain shrine embodied a greater moral force than the powerful ecclesiastics at whose call they had gathered.

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The clergy themselves were come from all sides; while those that were unable to attend had sent costly gifts to the miraculous Virgin. The Bishops of Mantua, Modena, Vercelli and Cremona had travelled to Pianura in state, the people flocking out beyond the gates to welcome them. Four mitred Abbots, several Monsignori, and Priors, Rectors, Vicars-general and canons innumerable rode in the procession, followed on foot by the humble army of parish priests and by interminable confraternities of all orders.

The approach of the great dignitaries was hailed with enthusiasm by the crowds lining the roads. Even the Bishop of Pianura, never popular with the people, received an unwonted measure of applause, and the white-cowled Prior of the Dominicans, riding by stern and close-lipped as a monk of Zurbaran's, was greeted with frenzied acclamations. The report that the Bishop and the heads of the religious houses in Pianura were to set free suppers for the pilgrims had doubtless quickened this outburst of piety; yet it was perhaps chiefly due to the sense of coming peril that had gradually permeated the dim consciousness of the crowd.

In the church, the glow of lights, the thrilling beauty of the music and the glitter of the priestly vestments were blent in a melting harmony of sound and color. The shrine of the Madonna shone with unearthly radiance. Hundreds of candles formed an elongated nimbus

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about her hieratic figure, which was surmounted by the canopy of cloth-of-gold presented by the Duke of Modena. The Bishops of Vercelli and Cremona had offered a robe of silver brocade studded with coral and turquoises, the devout Princess Clotilda of Savoy an emerald necklace, the Bishop of Pianura a marvellous veil of rose-point made in a Flemish convent; while on the statue's brow rested the Duke's jewelled diadem.

The Duke himself, seated in his tribune above the choir, observed the scene with a renewed appreciation of the Church's unfailing dramatic instinct. At first he saw in the spectacle only this outer and symbolic side, of which the mere sensuous beauty had always deeply moved him; but as he watched the effect produced on the great throng filling the aisles, he began to see that this external splendor was but the veil before the sanctuary, and to realize what de Crucis meant when he spoke of the deep hold of the Church upon the people. Every color, every gesture, every word and note of music that made up the texture of the gorgeous ceremonial might indeed seem part of a long-studied and astutely-planned effect. Yet each had its root in some instinct of the heart, some natural development of the inner life, so that they were in fact not the cunningly-adjusted fragments of an arbitrary pattern but the inseparable fibres of a living organism. It was Odo's misfortune to see too far ahead on the road along

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which his destiny was urging him. As he sat there, face to face with the people he was trying to lead, he heard above the music of the mass and the chant of the kneeling throng an echo of the question that Don Gervaso had once put to him:—"If you take Christ from the people, what have you to give them instead?"

He was roused by a burst of silver clarions. The mass was over, and the Duke and Duchess were to descend from their tribune and venerate the holy image before it was carried through the church.

Odo rose and gave his hand to his wife. They had not seen each other, save in public, since their last conversation in her closet. The Duchess walked with set lips and head erect, keeping her profile turned to him as they descended the steps and advanced to the choir. None knew better how to take her part in such a pageant. She had the gift of drawing upon herself the undivided attention of any assemblage in which she moved; and the consciousness of this power lent a kind of Olympian buoyancy to her gait. The richness of her dress and her extravagant display of jewels seemed almost a challenge to the sacred image blazing like a rainbow beneath its golden canopy; and Odo smiled to think that his childish fancy had once compared the brilliant being at his side to the humble tinsel-decked Virgin of the church at Pontesordo.

As the couple advanced, stillness fell on the church.

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The air was full of the lingering haze of incense, through which the sunlight from the clerestory poured in prismatic splendors on the statue of the Virgin. Rigid, superhuman, a molten flamboyancy of gold and gems, the wonder-working Madonna shone out above her worshippers. The Duke and Duchess paused, bowing deeply, below the choir. Then they mounted the steps and knelt before the shrine. As they did so a crash broke the silence, and the startled devotees saw that the ducal diadem had fallen from the Madonna's head.

The hush prolonged itself a moment; then a canon sprang forward to pick up the crown, and with the movement a murmur rose and spread through the church. The Duke's offering had fallen to the ground as he approached to venerate the blessed image. That this was an omen no man could doubt. It needed no augur to interpret it. The murmur, gathering force as it swept through the packed aisles, passed from surprise to fear, from fear to a deep hum of anger;—for the people understood, as plainly as though she had spoken, that the Virgin of the Valseccas had cast from her the gift of an unbeliever. . .

. . . . . .

The ceremonies over, the long procession was formed again and set out toward the city. The crowd had surged ahead, and when the Duke rode through the

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gates the streets were already thronged. Moving slowly between the compact mass of people he felt himself as closely observed as on the day of his state entry; but with far different effect. Enthusiasm had given way to a cold curiosity. The excitement of the spectators had spent itself in the morning, and the sight of their sovereign failed to rouse their flagging ardor. Now and then a cheer broke out, but it died again without kindling another in the uninflammable mass. Odo could not tell how much of this indifference was due to a natural reaction from the emotions of the morning, how much to his personal unpopularity, how much to the ominous impression produced by the falling of the Virgin's crown. He rode between his people oppressed by a sense of estrangement such as he had never known. He felt himself shut off from them by an impassable barrier of superstition and ignorance; and every effort to reach them was like the wrong turn in a labyrinth, drawing him farther from the issue to which it seemed to lead.

As he advanced under this indifferent or hostile scrutiny, he thought how much easier it would be to face a rain of bullets than this withering glare of criticism. A sudden longing to escape, to be done with it all, came over him with sickening force. His nerves ached with the physical strain of holding himself upright on his horse, of preserving the statuesque erect-

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ness proper to the occasion. He felt like one of his own ancestral effigies, of which the wooden framework had rotted under the splendid robes. A congestion at the head of a narrow street had checked the procession, and he was obliged to rein in his horse. He looked about and found himself in the centre of the square near the Baptistery. A few feet off, directly in line with him, was the weather-worn front of the Royal Printing-Press. He raised his head and saw a group of people on the balcony. Though they were close at hand, he saw them in a blur, against which Fulvia's figure suddenly detached itself. She had told him that she was to view the procession with the Andreonis; but through the mental haze which enveloped him her apparition struck a vague surprise. He looked at her intently, and their eyes met. A faint happiness stole over her face, but no recognition was possible, and she continued to gaze out steadily upon the throng below the balcony. Involuntarily his glance followed hers, and he saw that she was herself the centre of the crowd's attention. Her plain, almost Quakerish habit, and the tranquil dignity of her carriage, made her a conspicuous figure among the animated groups in the adjoining windows, and Odo, with the acuteness of perception which a public life develops, was instantly aware that her name was on every lip. At the same moment he saw a woman close to his horse's feet snatch up her child and make the sign against the

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evil eye. A boy who stood staring open-mouthed at Fulvia caught the gesture and repeated it; a barefoot friar imitated the boy, and it seemed to Odo that the familiar sign was spreading with malignant rapidity to the farthest limits of the crowd. The impression was only momentary; for the cavalcade was again in motion, and without raising his eyes he rode on, sick at heart. . .

. . . . . .

At nightfall a man opened the gate of the ducal gardens below the Chinese pavilion and stepped out into the deserted lane. He locked the gate and slipped the key into his pocket; then he turned and walked toward the centre of the town. As he reached the more populous quarters his walk slackened to a stroll; and now and then he paused to observe a knot of merry-makers or look through the curtains of the tents set up in the squares.

The man was plainly but decently dressed, like a petty tradesman or a lawyer's clerk, and the night being chill he wore a cloak, and had drawn his hat-brim over his forehead. He sauntered on, letting the crowd carry him, with the air of one who has an hour to kill, and whose holiday-making takes the form of an amused spectatorship. To such an observer the streets offered ample entertainment. The shrewd air discouraged lounging and kept the crowd in motion; but the open platforms built

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for dancing were thronged with couples, and every peep-show, wine-shop and astrologer's booth was packed to the doors. The shrines and street-lamps being all alight, and booths and platforms hung with countless lanterns, the scene was as bright as day; but in the ever-shifting medley of peasant-dresses, liveries, monkish cowls and carnival disguises, a soberly-clad man might easily go unremarked.

Reaching the square before the Cathedral, the solitary observer pushed his way through the idlers gathered about a dais with a curtain at the back. Before the curtain stood a Milanese quack, dressed like a noble gentleman, with sword and plumed hat, and rehearsing his cures in stentorian tones, while his zany, in the short mask and green-and-white habit of Brighella, cracked jokes and turned hand-springs for the diversion of the vulgar.

"Behold," the charlatan was shouting, "the marvellous Egyptian love-philter distilled from the pearl that the great Emperor Antony dropped into Queen Cleopatra's cup. This infallible fluid, handed down for generations in the family of my ancestor, the High Priest of Isis—" The bray of a neighboring showman's trumpet cut him short, and yielding to circumstances he drew back the curtain, and a tumbling-girl sprang out and began her antics on the front of the stage.

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"What did he say was the price of that drink, Giannina?" asked a young maid-servant pulling her neighbor's sleeve.

"Are you thinking of buying it for Pietrino, my beauty?" the other returned with a laugh. "Believe me, it is a sound proverb that says: *When the fruit is ripe it falls of itself.*"

The girl drew away angrily, and the quack took up his harangue:—"The same philter, ladies and gentlemen—though in confessing it I betray a professional secret—the same philter, I declare to you on the honor of a nobleman, whereby, in your own city, a lady no longer young and no way remarkable in looks or station, has captured and subjugated the affections of one so high, so exalted, so above all others in beauty, rank, wealth, power and dignities—"

"Oh, oh, that's the Duke!" sniggered a voice in the crowd.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I name no names!" cried the quack impressively.

"No need to," retorted the voice.

"They do say, though, she gave him something to drink," said a young woman to a youth in a clerk's dress. "The saying is she studied medicine with the Turks."

"The Moors, you mean," said the clerk with an air of superiority.

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"Well, they say her mother was a Turkey slave and her father a murderer from the Sultan's galleys."

"No, no, she's plain Piedmontese, I tell you. Her father was a physician in Turin, and was driven out of the country for poisoning his patients in order to watch their death-agonies."

"They say she's good to the poor, though," said another voice doubtfully.

"Good to the poor? Ay, that's what they said of her father. All I know is that she heard Stefano the weaver's lad had the falling sickness, and she carried him a potion with her own hands, and the next day the child was dead, and a Carmelite friar, who saw the phial he drank from, said it was the same shape and size as one that was found in a witch's grave when they were digging the foundations for the new monastery."

"Ladies and gentlemen," shrieked the quack, "what am I offered for a drop of this priceless liquor?"

The listener turned aside and pushed his way toward the farther end of the square. As he did so he ran against a merry-andrew who thrust a long printed sheet in his hand.

"Buy my satirical ballads, ladies and gentlemen!" the fellow shouted. "Two for a farthing, invented and written by an own cousin of the great Pasquino of Rome! What will you have, sir? Here's the secret history of a famous Prince's amours with an atheist—here's the

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true scandal of an illustrious lady's necklace—two for a farthing . . . and my humblest thanks to your excellency." He pocketed the coin, and the other, thrusting the broadsheets beneath his cloak, pushed on to the nearest coffee-house.

Here every table was thronged, and the babble of talk so loud that the stranger, hopeless of obtaining refreshment, pressed his way into the remotest corner of the room and seated himself on an empty cask. At first he sat motionless, silently observing the crowd; then he drew forth the ballads and ran his eye over them. He was still engaged in this study when his notice was attracted by a loud discussion going forward between a party of men at the nearest table. The disputants, petty tradesmen or artisans by their dress, had evidently been warmed by a good flagon of wine, and their tones were so lively that every word reached the listener on the cask.

"Reform, reform!" cried one, who appeared by his dress and manner to be the weightiest of the company —"it 's all very well to cry reform; but what I say is that most of those that are howling for it no more know what they're asking than a parrot that 's been taught the litany. Now the first question is: who benefits by your reform? And what 's the answer to that, eh? Is it the tradesmen? The merchants? The clerks, artisans, household servants, I ask you? I hear some of my fel-

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low-tradesmen complaining that the nobility don't pay their bills. Will they be better pay, think you, when the Duke has halved their revenues? Will the quality keep up as large households, employ as many lacqueys, set as lavish tables, wear as fine clothes, collect as many rarities, buy as many horses, give us, in short, as many opportunities of making our profit out of their pleasure? What I say is, if we're to have new taxes, don't let them fall on the very class we live by!"

"That's true enough," said another speaker, a lean bilious man with a pen behind his ear. "The peasantry are the only class that are going to profit by this constitution."

"And what do the peasantry do for us, I should like to know?" the first speaker went on triumphantly. "As far as the fat friars go, I'm not sorry to see them squeezed a trifle, for they've wrung enough money out of our women-folk to lie between feathers from now till doomsday; but I say, if you care for your pockets, don't lay hands on the nobility!"

"Gently, gently, my friend," exclaimed a cautious flaccid-looking man setting down his glass. "Father and son, for four generations, my family have served Pianura with Church candles, and I can tell you that since these new atheistical notions came in the nobility are not the good patrons they used to be. But as for the friars, I should be sorry to see them meddled with. It's

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true they may get the best morsel in the pot and the warmest seat on the hearth—and one of them, now and then, may take too long to teach a pretty girl her Pater Noster—but I'm not so sure we shall be better off when they're gone. Formerly, if a child too many came to poor folk they could always comfort themselves with the thought that, if there was no room for him at home, the Church was there to provide for him. But if we drive out the good friars, a man will have to count mouths before he dares look at his wife too lovingly."

"Well," said the scribe with a dry smile, "I've a notion the good friars have always taken more than they gave; and if it were not for the gaping mouths under the cowl even a poor man might have victuals enough for his own."

The first speaker turned on him contentiously.

"Do I understand you are for this new charter, then?" he asked.

"No, no," said the other. "Better hot polenta than a cold ortolan. Things are none too good as they are, but I never care to taste first of a new dish. And in this case I don't fancy the cook."

"Ah, that's it," said the soft man. "It's too much like the apothecary's wife mixing his drugs for him. Men of Roman lineage want no women to govern them!" He puffed himself out and thrust a hand in his bosom. "Besides, gentlemen," he added, dropping

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his voice and glancing cautiously about the room, "the saints are my witness I 'm not superstitious—but frankly, now, I don't much fancy this business of the Virgin's crown."

"What do you mean?" asked a lean visionary-looking youth who had been drinking and listening.

"Why, sir, I need n't say I 'm the last man in Pianura to listen to women's tattle; but my wife had it straight from Cino the barber, whose sister is portress of the Benedictines, that, two days since, one of the nuns foretold the whole business, precisely as it happened—and what 's more, many that were in the Church this morning will tell you that they distinctly saw the blessed image raise both arms and tear the crown from her head."

"H'm," said the young man flippantly, "what became of the Bambino meanwhile, I wonder?"

The scribe shrugged his shoulders. "We all know," said he, "that Cino the barber lies like a christened Jew; but I 'm not surprised the thing was known in advance, for I make no doubt the priests pulled the wires that brought down the crown."

The fat man looked scandalized, and the first speaker waved the subject aside as unworthy of attention.

"Such tales are for women and monks," he said impatiently. "But the business has its serious side. I tell you we are being hurried to our ruin. Here 's this mat-

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ter of draining the marshes at Pontesordo. Who's to pay for that? The class that profits by it? Not by a long way. It's we who drain the land, and the peasants are to live on it."

The visionary youth tossed back his hair. "But is n't that an inspiration to you, sir?" he exclaimed. "Does not your heart dilate at the thought of uplifting the condition of your down-trodden fellows?"

"My fellows? The peasantry my fellows?" cried the other. "I'd have you know, my young master, that I come of a long and honorable line of cloth-merchants, that have had their names on the Guild for two hundred years and over. I've nothing to do with the peasantry, thank God!"

The youth had emptied another glass. "What?" he screamed. "You deny the universal kinship of man? You disown your starving brother? Proud tyrant, remember the Bastille!" He burst into tears and began to quote Alfieri.

"Well," said the fat man, turning a disgusted shoulder on this display of emotion, "to my mind this business of draining Pontesordo is too much like telling the Almighty what to do. If God made the land wet, what right have we to dry it? Those that begin by meddling with the Creator's works may end by laying hands on the Creator."

"You're right," said another. "There's no knowing

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where these new-fangled notions may land us. For my part, I was rather taken by them at first; but since I find that his Highness, to pay for all his good works, is cutting down his household and throwing decent people out of a job—like my own son, for instance, that was one of the under-steward's boys at the palace—why, since then, I begin to see a little farther into the game."

A shabby shrewd-looking fellow in a dirty coat and snuff-stained stock had sauntered up to the table and stood listening with an amused smile.

"Ah," said the scribe, glancing up, "here's a thoroughgoing reformer, who'll be asking us all to throw up our hats for the new charter."

The new-comer laughed contemptuously. "I?" he said. "God forbid! The new charter's none of my making. It's only another dodge for getting round the populace—for appearing to give them what they would rise up and take if it were denied them any longer."

"Why, I thought you were hot for these reforms?" exclaimed the fat man with surprise.

The other shrugged. "You might as well say I was in favor of having the sun rise to-morrow. It would probably rise at the same hour if I voted against it. Reform is bound to come, whether your Dukes and Princes are for it or against it; and those that grant constitutions instead of refusing them are like men who tie a string

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to their hats before going out in a gale. The string may hold for a while—but if it blows hard enough the hats will all come off in the end."

"Ay, ay; and meanwhile we furnish the string from our own pockets," said the scribe with a chuckle.

The shabby man grinned. "It won't be the last thing to come out of your pockets," said he, turning to push his way toward another table.

The others rose and called for their reckoning; and the listener on the cask slipped out of his corner, elbowed a passage to the door and stepped forth into the square.

It was after midnight, a thin drizzle was falling, and the crowd had scattered. The rain was beginning to extinguish the paper lanterns and the torches, and the canvas sides of the tents flapped dismally, like wet sheets on a clothes-line. The man drew his cloak closer, and avoiding the stragglers who crossed his path, turned into the first street that led to the palace. He walked fast over the slippery cobble-stones, buffeted by a rising wind and threading his way between dark walls and sleeping house-fronts till he reached the lane below the ducal gardens. He unlocked the door by which he had come forth, entered the gardens, and paused a moment on the terrace above the lane.

Behind him rose the palace, a dark irregular bulk, with a lighted window showing here and there. Before

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him lay the city, an indistinguishable huddle of roofs and towers under the rainy night. He stood awhile gazing out over it; then he turned and walked toward the palace. The garden alleys were deserted, the pleached walks dark as subterranean passages, with the wet gleam of statues starting spectrally out of the blackness. The man walked rapidly, leaving the Borromini wing on his left, and skirting the outstanding mass of the older buildings. Behind the marble buttresses of the chapel he crossed the dense obscurity of a court between high walls, found a door under an archway, turned a key in the lock, and gained a spiral stairway as dark as the court. He groped his way up the stairs and paused a moment on the landing to listen. Then he opened another door, lifted a heavy hanging of tapestry, and stepped into the Duke's closet. It stood empty, with a lamp burning low on the desk.

The man threw off his cloak and hat, dropped into a chair beside the desk, and hid his face in his hands.

IX

IT was the eve of the Duke's birthday. A cabinet council had been called in the morning, and his Highness's ministers had submitted to him the revised draft of the constitution which was to be proclaimed on the morrow.

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Throughout the conference, which was brief and formal, Odo had been conscious of a subtle change in the ministerial atmosphere. Instead of the current of resistance against which he had grown used to forcing his way, he became aware of a tacit yielding to his will. Trescorre had apparently withdrawn his opposition to the charter, and the other ministers had followed suit. To Odo's overwrought imagination there was something ominous in the change. He had counted on the goad of opposition to fight off the fatal languor which he had learned to expect at such crises. Now that he found there was to be no struggle he understood how largely his zeal had of late depended on such factitious incentives. He felt an irrational longing to throw himself on the other side of the conflict, to tear in bits the paper awaiting his signature, and disown the policy which had dictated it. But the tide of acquiescence on which he was afloat was no stagnant back-water of indifference, but the glassy reach just above the fall of a river. The current was as swift as it was smooth, and he felt himself hurried forward to an end he could no longer escape. He took the pen which Trescorre handed him, and signed the constitution.

The meeting over, he summoned Gamba. He felt the need of such encouragement as the hunchback alone could give. Fulvia's enthusiasms were too unreal, too abstract. She lived in a region of ideals, whence ugly

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facts were swept out by some process of mental housewifery which kept her world perpetually smiling and immaculate. Gamba at least fed his convictions on facts. If his outlook was narrow it was direct: no roseate medium of fancy was interposed between his vision and the truth.

He stood listening thoughtfully while Odo poured forth his doubts.

"Your Highness may well hesitate," he said at last. "There are always more good reasons against a new state of things than for it. I am not surprised that Count Trescorre appears to have withdrawn his opposition. I believe he now honestly wishes your Highness to proclaim the constitution."

Odo looked up in surprise. "You do not mean that he has come to believe in it?"

Gamba smiled. "Probably not in your Highness's sense; but he may have found a use of his own for it."

"What do you mean?" Odo asked.

"If he does not believe it will benefit the state he may think it will injure your Highness."

"Ah—" said the Duke slowly.

There was a pause, during which he was possessed by the same shuddering reluctance to fix his mind on the facts before him as when he had questioned the hunchback about Momola's death. He longed to cast the whole business aside, to be up and away from it, draw-

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ing breath in a new world where every air was not tainted with corruption. He raised his head with an effort.

"You think, then, that the liberals are secretly acting against me in this matter?"

"I am persuaded of it, your Highness."

Odo hesitated. "You have always told me," he began again, "that the love of dominion was your brother's ruling passion. If he really believes this movement will be popular with the people, why should he secretly oppose it, instead of making the most of his own share in it as the minister of a popular sovereign?"

"For several reasons," Gamba answered promptly. "In the first place, the reforms your Highness has introduced are not of his own choosing, and Trescorre has little sympathy with any policy he has not dictated. In the second place, the powers and opportunities of a constitutional minister are too restricted to satisfy his appetite for rule; and thirdly—" he paused a moment, as though doubtful how his words would be received—"I suspect Trescorre of having a private score against your Highness, which he would be glad to pay off publicly."

Odo fell silent, yielding himself to a fresh current of thought.

"I know not what score he may have against me," he said at length; "but what injures me must injure the

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state, and if Trescorre has any such motive for withdrawing his opposition, it must be because he believes the constitution will defeat its own ends."

"He does believe that, assuredly; but he is not the only one of your Highness's ministers that would ruin the state on the chance of finding an opportunity among the ruins."

"That is as it may be," said Odo with a touch of weariness. "I have seen enough of human ambition to learn how limited and unimaginative a passion it is. If it saw farther I should fear it more. But if it is short-sighted it sees clearly at close range; and the motive you ascribe to Trescorre would imply that he believes the constitution will be a failure."

"Without doubt, your Highness. I am convinced that your ministers have done all they could to prevent the proclamation of the charter, and failing that, to thwart its workings if it be proclaimed. In this they have gone hand in hand with the clergy, and their measures have been well taken. But I do not believe that any state of mind produced by external influences can long withstand the natural drift of opinion; and your Highness may be sure that, though the talkers and writers are mostly against you in this matter, the mass of the people are with you."

Odo answered with a despairing gesture. "How can I be sure, when the people have no means of express-

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ing their needs? It is like trying to guess the wants of a deaf and dumb man!"

The hunchback flushed suddenly. "The people will not always be deaf and dumb," he said. "Some day they will speak."

"Not in my day," said Odo wearily. "And meanwhile we blunder on without ever really knowing what incalculable instincts and prejudices are pitted against us. You and your party tell me the people are sick of the burdens the clergy lay on them—yet their blind devotion to the Church is manifest at every turn, and it did not need the business of the Virgin's crown to show me how little reason and justice can avail against such influences."

Gamba replied by an impatient gesture. "As to the Virgin's crown," he said, "your Highness must have guessed it was one of the friars' tricks: a last expedient to turn the people against you. I was not bred up by a priest for nothing; I know what past masters those gentry are in raising ghosts and reading portents. They know the minds of the poor folk as the herdsman knows the habits of his cattle; and for generations they have used that knowledge to bring the people more completely under their control."

"And what have we to oppose to such a power?" Odo exclaimed. "We are fighting the battle of ideas against passions, of reflection against instinct; and

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you have but to look in the human heart to guess which side will win in such a struggle. We have science and truth and common-sense with us, you say—yes, but the Church has love and fear and tradition, and the solidarity of nigh two thousand years of dominion."

Gamba listened in respectful silence; then he replied with a faint smile: "All that your Highness says is true; but I beg leave to relate to your Highness a tale which I read lately in an old book of your library. According to this story it appears that when the early Christians of Alexandria set out to destroy the pagan idols in the temples they were seized with great dread at sight of the god Serapis; for even those that did not believe in the old gods feared them, and none dared raise a hand against the sacred image. But suddenly a soldier who was bolder than the rest flung his battle-axe at the figure—and when it broke in pieces, there rushed out nothing worse than a great company of rats." . .

. . . . . .

The Duke had promised to visit Fulvia that evening. For several days his state of indecision had made him find pretexts for avoiding her; but now that the charter was signed and he had ordered its proclamation, he craved the contact of her unwavering faith.

He found her alone in the dusk of the convent parlor;

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but he had hardly crossed the threshold before he was aware of an indefinable change in his surroundings. She advanced with an impulsiveness out of harmony with the usual tranquillity of their meetings, and he felt her hand tremble and burn in his. In the twilight it seemed to him that her very dress had a warmer rustle and glimmer, that there emanated from her glance and movements some heady fragrance of a long-past summer. He smiled to think that this phantom coquetry should have risen at the summons of an academic degree; but some deeper sense in him was stirred as by a vision of waste riches adrift on the dim seas of chance.

For a moment she sat silent, as in the days when they had been too near each other for many words; and there was something indescribably soothing in this dreamlike return to the past. It was he who roused himself first.

"How young you look!" he said, giving involuntary utterance to his thought.

"Do I?" she answered gaily. "I am glad of that, for I feel extraordinarily young to-night. Perhaps it is because I have been thinking a great deal of the old days—of Venice and Turin—and of the highroad to Vercelli, for instance." She glanced at him with a smile.

"Do you know," she went on, moving to a seat at his

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side, and laying a hand on the arm of his chair, "that there is one secret of mine you have never guessed in all these years?"

Odo returned her smile. "What is it, I wonder?" he said.

She fixed him with bright bantering eyes. "I knew why you deserted us at Vercelli." He uttered an exclamation, but she lifted a hand to his lips. "Ah, how angry I was then—but why be angry now? It all happened so long ago; and if it had not happened—who knows?—perhaps you would never have pitied me enough to love me as you did." She laughed softly, reminiscently, leaning back as if to let the tide of memories ripple over her. Then she raised her head suddenly, and said in a changed voice: "Are your plans fixed for to-morrow?"

Odo glanced at her in surprise. Her mind seemed to move as capriciously as Maria Clementina's.

"The constitution is signed," he answered, "and my ministers proclaim it to-morrow morning." He looked at her a moment, and lifted her hand to his lips. "Everything has been done according to your wishes," he said.

She drew away with a start, and he saw that she had turned pale. "No, no—not as I wish," she murmured. "It must not be because *I* wish—" she broke off and her hand slipped from his.

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"You have taught me to wish as you wish," he answered gently. "Surely you would not disown your pupil now?"

Her agitation increased. "Do not call yourself that!" she exclaimed. "Not even in jest. What you have done has been done of your own choice—because you thought it best for your people. My nearness or absence could have made no difference."

He looked at her with growing wonder. "Why this sudden modesty?" he said with a smile. "I thought you prided yourself on your share in the great work."

She tried to force an answering smile, but the curve broke into a quiver of distress, and she came close to him, with a gesture that seemed to take flight from herself.

"Don't say it, don't say it!" she broke out. "What right have they to call it my doing? I but stood aside and watched you and gloried in you—is there any guilt to a woman in *that?*" She clung to him a moment, hiding her face in his breast.

He loosened her arms gently, that he might draw back and look at her. "Fulvia," he asked, "what ails you? You are not yourself to-night. Has anything happened to distress you? Have you been annoyed or alarmed in any way?—It is not possible," he broke off, "that Trescorre has been here—?"

She drew away, flushed and protesting. "No, no,"

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she exclaimed. "Why should Trescorre come here? Why should you fancy that any one has been here? I am excited, I know; I talk idly; but it is because I have been thinking too long of these things—"

"Of what things?"

"Of what people say—how can one help hearing that? I sometimes fancy that the more withdrawn one lives the more distinctly one hears the outer noises."

"But why should you heed the outer noises? You have never done so before."

"Perhaps I was wrong not to do so before. Perhaps I should have listened sooner. Perhaps others have seen—understood—sooner than I—oh, the thought is intolerable!"

She moved a pace or two away, and then, regaining the mastery of her lips and eyes, turned to him with a show of calmness.

"Your heart was never in this charter—" she began.

"Fulvia!" he cried protestingly; but she lifted a silencing hand. "Ah, I have seen it—I have felt it—but I was never willing to own that you were right. My pride in you blinded me, I suppose. I could not bear to dream any fate for you but the greatest. I saw you always leading events, rather than waiting on them. But true greatness lies in the man, not in his actions. Compromise, delay, renunciation—these may be as heroic as conflict. A woman's vision is so narrow that I did

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not see this at first. You have always told me that I looked only at one side of the question; but I see the other side now—I see that you were right."

Odo stood silent. He had followed her with growing wonder. A *volte-face* so little in keeping with her mental habits immediately struck him as a feint; yet so strangely did it accord with his own secret reluctances that these inclined him to let it pass unquestioned.

Some instinctive loyalty to his past checked the temptation. "I am not sure that I understand you," he said slowly. "Have you lost faith in the ideas we have worked for?"

She hesitated, and he saw the struggle beneath her surface calmness. "No, no," she exclaimed quickly, "I have not lost faith in them—"

"In me, then?"

She smiled with a disarming sadness. "That would be so much simpler!" she murmured.

"What do you mean, then?" he urged. "We must understand each other." He paused, and measured his words out slowly. "Do you think it a mistake to proclaim the constitution to-morrow?"

Again her face was full of shadowy contradictions. "I entreat you not to proclaim it to-morrow," she said in a low voice.

Odo felt the blood drum in his ears. Was not this

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the word for which he had waited? But still some deeper instinct held him back, warning him, as it seemed, that to fall below his purpose at such a juncture was the only measurable failure. He must know more before he yielded, see deeper into her heart and his; and each moment brought the clearer conviction that there was more to know and see.

"This is unlike you, Fulvia," he said. "You cannot make such a request on impulse. You must have a reason."

She smiled. "You told me once that a woman's reasons are only impulses in men's clothes."

But he was not to be diverted by this thrust. "I shall think so now," he said, "unless you can give me some better account of yours."

She was silent, and he pressed on with a persistency for which he himself could hardly account: "You must have a reason for this request."

"I have one," she said, dropping her attempts at evasion.

"And it is—?"

She paused again, with a look of appeal against which he had to stiffen himself.

"I do not believe the time has come," she said at length.

"You think the people are not ready for the constitution?"

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She answered with an effort: "I think the people are not ready for it."

He fell silent, and they sat facing each other, but with eyes apart.

"You have received this impression from Gamba, from Andreoni—from the members of our party?"

She made no reply.

"Remember, Fulvia," he went on almost sternly, "that this is the end for which we have worked together all these years—the end for which we renounced each other and went forth in our youth, you to exile and I to an unwilling sovereignty. It was because we loved this cause better than ourselves that we had strength to give up our own hopes of happiness. If we betray the cause from any merely personal motive we shall have fallen below our earlier selves." He waited again, but she was still silent. "Can you swear to me," he went on, "that no such motive influences you now? That you honestly believe we have been deceived and mistaken? That our years of faith and labor have been wasted, and that, if mankind is to be helped, it is to be in other ways and by other efforts than ours?"

He stood before her accusingly, almost, the passion of the long fight surging up in him as he felt the weapon drop from his hand.

Fulvia had sat motionless under his appeal; but as

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he paused she rose with an impulsive gesture. "Oh, why do you torment me with questions?" she cried, half-sobbing. "I venture to counsel a delay, and you arraign me as though I stood at the day of judgment!"

"It *is* our day of judgment," he retorted. "It is the day on which life confronts us with our own actions, and we must justify them or own ourselves deluded." He went up to her and caught her hands entreatingly. "Fulvia," he said, "I too have doubted, wavered—and if you will give me one honest reason that is worthy of us both—"

She broke from him to hide her weeping. "Reasons! reasons!" she stammered. "What does the heart know of reasons? I ask a favor—the first I ever asked of you—and you answer it by haggling with me for reasons!"

Something in her voice and gesture was like a lightning-flash over a dark landscape. In an instant he saw the pit at his feet.

"Some one has been with you. Those words were not yours," he cried.

She rallied instantly. "That is a pretext for not heeding them!" she returned.

The lightning glared again. He stepped close and faced her.

"The Duchess has been here," he said.

She dropped into a chair and hid her face from him. A wave of anger mounted from his heart, choking back

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his words and filling his brain with its fumes. But as it subsided he felt himself suddenly cool, firm, attempered. There could be no wavering, no self-questioning now.

"When did this happen?" he asked.

She shook her head despairingly.

"Fulvia," he said, "if you will not speak I will speak for you. I can guess what arguments were used—what threats, even. Were there threats?" burst from him in a fresh leap of anger.

She raised her head slowly. "Threats would not have mattered," she said.

"But your fears were played on—your fears for my safety?—Fulvia, answer me!" he insisted.

She rose suddenly and laid her arms about his shoulders, with a gesture half-tender, half-maternal.

"Oh," she said, "why will you torture me? I have borne much for our love's sake, and would have borne this too—in silence, like the rest—but to speak of it is to relive it; and my strength fails me!"

He held her hands fast, keeping his eyes on hers. "No," he said, "for your strength never failed you when there was any call on it; and our whole past calls on it now. Rouse yourself, Fulvia: look life in the face! You were told there might be troubles to-morrow—that I was in danger, perhaps?"

"There was worse—there was worse," she shuddered.

"Worse?"

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"The blame was laid on me—the responsibility. Your love for me, my power over you, were accused. The people hate me—they hate you for loving me! Oh, I have destroyed you!" she cried.

Odo felt a slow cold strength pouring into all his veins. It was as though his enemies, in thinking to mix a mortal poison, had rendered him invulnerable. He bent over her with great gentleness.

"Fulvia, this is madness," he said. "A moment's thought must show you what passions are here at work. Can you not rise above such fears? No one can judge between us but ourselves."

"Ah, but you do not know—you will not understand. Your life may be in danger!" she cried.

"I have been told that before," he said contemptuously. "It is a common trick of the political game."

"This is no trick," she exclaimed. "I was made to see—to understand—and I swear to you that the danger is real."

"And what if it were? Is the Church to have all the martyrs?" said he gaily. "Come, Fulvia, shake off such fancies. My life is as safe as yours. At worst there may be a little hissing to be faced. That is easy enough compared to facing one's own doubts. And I have no doubts now—that is all past, thank heaven! I see the road straight before me—as straight as when you showed it to me once before, years ago, in the inn-parlor at

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Peschiera. You pointed the way to it then; surely you would not hold me back from it now?"

He took her in his arms and kissed her lips to silence.

"When we meet to-morrow," he said, releasing her, "it will be as teacher and pupil, you in your doctor's gown and I a learner at your feet. Put your old faith in me into your argument, and we shall have all Pianura converted."

He hastened away through the dim gardens, carrying a boy's heart in his breast.

X

THE University of Pianura was lodged in the ancient *Signoria* or Town Hall of the free city; and here, on the afternoon of the Duke's birthday, the civic dignitaries and the leading men of the learned professions had assembled to see the doctorate conferred on the Signorina Fulvia Vivaldi and on several less conspicuous candidates of the other sex.

The city was again in gala dress. Early that morning the new constitution had been proclaimed, with much firing of cannon and display of official fireworks; but even these great news, and their attendant manifestations, had failed to enliven the populace, who, instead of filling the streets with their usual stir, hung massed at certain points, as though curiously waiting on events.

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There are few sights more ominous than that of a crowd thus observing itself, watching in inconscient suspense for the unknown crisis which its own passions have engendered.

It was known that his Highness, after the public banquet at the palace, was to proceed in state to the University; and the throng was thick about the palace gates and in the streets betwixt it and the *Signoria*. Here the square was close-packed, and every window choked with gazers, as the Duke's coach came in sight, escorted meagrely by his equerries and the half-dozen light-horse that preceded him. The small escort, and the marked absence of military display, perhaps disappointed the splendor-loving crowd; and from this cause or another, scarce a cheer was heard as his Highness descended from his coach, and walked up the steps to the porch of ancient carved stone where the faculty awaited him.

The hall was already filled with students and graduates, and with the guests of the University. Through this grave assemblage the Duke passed up to the row of arm-chairs beneath the dais at the farther end of the room. Trescorre, who was to have attended his Highness, had excused himself on the plea of indisposition, and only a few gentlemen-in-waiting accompanied the Duke; but in the brown half-light of the old Gothic hall their glittering uniforms contrasted

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brilliantly with the black gowns of the students, and the sober broadcloth of the learned professions. A discreet murmur of enthusiasm rose at their approach, mounting almost to a cheer as the Duke bowed before taking his seat; for the audience represented the class most in sympathy with his policy and most confident of its success.

The meetings of the faculty were held in the great council-chamber where the Rectors of the old free city had assembled; and such a setting was regarded as peculiarly appropriate to the present occasion. The fact was alluded to, with much wealth of historical and mythological analogy, by the President, who opened the ceremonies with a polysyllabic Latin oration, in which the Duke was compared to Apollo, Hercules and Jason, as well as to the flower of sublunary heroes.

This feat of rhetoric over, the candidates were called on to advance and receive their degrees. The men came first, profiting by the momentary advantage of sex, but clearly aware of its inability to confer even momentary importance in the eyes of the impatient audience. A pause followed, and then Fulvia appeared. Against the red-robed faculty at the back of the dais, she stood tall and slender in her black cap and gown. The high windows of painted glass shed a paleness on her face, but her carriage was light and assured as she advanced to the President and knelt to receive her degree. The

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parchment was placed in her hand, the furred hood laid on her shoulders; then, after another flourish of rhetoric, she was led to the lectern from which her discourse was to be delivered. Odo sat just below her, and as she took her place their eyes met for an instant. He was caught up in the serene exaltation of her look, as though she soared with him above wind and cloud to a region of unshadowed calm; then her eyes fell and she began to speak.

She had a pretty mastery of Latin, and though she had never before spoken in public, her poetical recitations, and the early habit of intercourse with her father's friends, had given her a fair measure of fluency and self-possession. These qualities were raised to eloquence by the sweetness of her voice, and by the grave beauty which made the academic gown seem her natural wear, rather than a travesty of learning. Odo at first had some difficulty in fixing his attention on what she said; and when he controlled his thoughts she was in the height of her panegyric of constitutional liberty. She had begun slowly, almost coldly; but now her theme possessed her. One by one she evoked the familiar formulas with which his mind had once reverberated. They woke no echo in him now; but he saw that she could still set them ringing through the sensibilities of her hearers. As she stood there, a slight impassioned figure, warming to her high argument, his sense of irony

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was touched by the incongruity of her background. The wall behind her was covered by an ancient fresco, fast fading under its touches of renewed gilding, and representing the patron scholars of the mediæval world: the theologians, law-givers and logicians under whose protection the free city had placed its budding liberties. There they sat, rigid and sumptuous on their Gothic thrones: Origen, Zeno, David, Lycurgus, Aristotle; listening in a kind of cataleptic helplessness to a confession of faith that scattered their doctrines to the winds. As he looked and listened, a weary sense of the reiterance of things came over him. For what were these ancient manipulators of ideas, prestidigitators of a vanished world of thought, but the forbears of the long line of theorists of whom Fulvia was the last inconscient mouthpiece? The new game was still played with the old counters, the new jugglers repeated the old tricks; and the very words now poured out in defence of the new cause were but mercenaries scarred in the service of its enemies. For generations, for centuries man had fought on; crying for liberty, dreaming it was won, waking to find himself the slave of the new forces he had generated, burning and being burnt for the same beliefs under different guises, calling his instincts ideas and his ideas revelations; destroying, rebuilding, falling, rising, mending broken weapons, championing extinct illusions, mistaking his failures for achievements

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and planting his flag on the ramparts as they fell. And as the vision of this inveterate conflict rose before him, Odo saw that the beauty, the power, the immortality, dwelt not in the idea but in the struggle for it.

His resistance yielded as this sense stole over him, and with an almost physical relief he felt himself drawn once more into the familiar current of emotion. Yes, it was better after all to be one of that great unconquerable army, though, like the Trojans fighting for a phantom Helen, they might be doing battle for the shadow of a shade; better to march in their ranks, endure with them, fight with them, fall with them, than to miss the great enveloping sense of brotherhood that turned defeat to victory.

As the conviction grew in him, Fulvia's words regained their lost significance. Through the set mask of language the living thoughts looked forth, old indeed as the world, but renewed with the new life of every heart that bore them. She had left the abstract and dropped to concrete issues: to the gift of the constitution, the benefits and obligations it implied, the new relations it established between ruler and subject and between man and man. Odo saw that she approached the question without flinching. No trace remained of the trembling woman who had clung to him the night before. Her old convictions repossessed her and she soared above human fears.

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So engrossed was he that he had been unaware of a growing murmur of sound which seemed to be forcing its way from without through the walls of the ancient building. As Fulvia's oration neared its end the murmur rose to a roar. Startled faces were turned toward the doors of the council-chamber, and one of the Duke's gentlemen left his seat and made his way through the audience. Odo sat motionless, his eyes on Fulvia. He noticed that her face paled as the sound reached her, but there was no break in the voice with which she uttered the closing words of her peroration. As she ended, the noise was momentarily drowned under a loud burst of clapping; but this died in a hush of apprehension, through which the outer tumult became more ominously audible. The equerry reëntered the hall with a disordered countenance. He hastened to the Duke and addressed him urgently.

"Your Highness," he said, "the crowd has thickened and wears an ugly look. There are many friars abroad, and images of the Mountain Virgin are being carried in procession. Will your Highness be pleased to remain here while I summon an escort from the barracks?"

Odo was still watching Fulvia. She had received the applause of the audience with a deep reverence, and was now in the act of withdrawing to the inner room at the back of the dais. Her eyes met Odo's; she smiled and the door closed on her. He turned to the equerry.

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"There is no need of an escort," he said. "I trust my people if they do not trust me."

"But, your Highness, the streets are full of demagogues who have been haranguing the people since morning. The crowd is shouting against the constitution and against the Signorina Vivaldi."

A flame of anger passed over the Duke's face; but he subdued it instantly.

"Go to the Signorina Vivaldi," he said, pointing to the door by which Fulvia had left the hall. "Assure her that there is no danger, but ask her to remain where she is till the crowd disperses, and request the faculty in my name to remain with her."

The equerry bowed, and hurried up the steps of the dais, while the Duke signed to his other companions to precede him to the door of the hall. As they walked down the long room, between the close-packed ranks of the audience, the outer tumult surged threateningly toward them. Near the doorway, another of the gentlemen-in-waiting was seen to speak with the Duke.

"Your Highness," he said, "there is a private way at the back by which you may yet leave the building unobserved."

"You appear to forget that I entered it publicly," said Odo.

"But, your Highness, we cannot answer for the consequences—"

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The Duke signed to the ushers to throw open the doors. They obeyed, and he stepped out into the stone vestibule preceding the porch. The iron-barred outer doors of this vestibule were securely bolted, and the porter hung back in affright at the order to unlock them.

"Your Highness, the people are raving mad," he said, flinging himself on his knees.

Odo turned impatiently to his escort. "Unbar the doors, gentlemen," he said. The blood was drumming in his ears, but his eye was clear and steady, and he noted with curious detachment the comic agony of the fat porter's face, and the strain and swell of the equerry's muscles as he dragged back the ponderous bolts.

The doors swung open, and the Duke emerged. Below him, still with that unimpaired distinctness of vision which seemed a part of his heightened vitality, he saw a great gesticulating mass of people. They packed the square so closely that their own numbers held them immovable, save for their swaying arms and heads; and those whom the square could not contain had climbed to porticoes, balconies and cornices, and massed themselves in the neck of the adjoining streets. The handful of light-horse who had escorted the Duke's carriage formed a single line at the foot of the steps, so that the approach to the porch was still clear; but it was plain

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that the crowd, with its next movement, would break through this slender barrier and hem in the Duke.

At Odo's appearance the shouting had ceased and every eye was turned on him. He stood there, a brilliant target, in his laced coat of peach-colored velvet, his breast covered with orders, a hand on his jewelled sword-hilt. For a moment sovereign and subjects measured each other; and in that moment Odo drank his deepest draught of life. He was not thinking now of the constitution or its opponents. His present business was to get down the steps and into the carriage, returning to the palace as openly as he had come. He was conscious of neither pity nor hatred for the throng in his path. For the moment he regarded them merely as a natural force, to be fought against like storm or flood. His clearest sensation was one of relief at having at last some material obstacle to spend his strength against, instead of the impalpable powers which had so long beset him. He felt, too, a boyish satisfaction at his own steadiness of pulse and eye, at the absence of that fatal inertia which he had come to dread. So clear was his mental horizon that it embraced not only the present crisis, but a dozen incidents leading up to it. He remembered that Trescorre had urged him to take a larger escort, and that he had refused on the ground that any military display might imply a doubt of his people. He was glad now that he had done so. He

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would have hated to slink to his carriage behind a barrier of drawn swords. He wanted no help to see him through this business. The blood sang in his veins at the thought of facing it alone.

The silence lasted but a moment; then an image of the Mountain Virgin was suddenly thrust in air, and a voice cried out: "Down with our Lady's enemies! We want no laws against the friars!"

A howl caught up the words and tossed them to and fro above the seething heads. Images of the Virgin, religious banners, the blue-and-white of the Madonna's colors, suddenly canopied the crowd.

"We want the Barnabites back!" sang out another voice.

"Down with the free-thinkers!" yelled a hundred angry throats.

A stone or two sped through the air and struck the sculptures of the porch.

"Your Highness!" cried the equerry who stood nearest, and would have snatched the Duke back within doors.

For all answer, Odo stepped clear of the porch and advanced to the edge of the steps. As he did so, a shower of missiles hummed about him, and a stone struck him on the lip. The blood rushed to his head, and he swayed in the sudden grip of anger; but he mastered himself and raised his lace handkerchief to the cut.

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His gentlemen had drawn their swords; but he signed to them to sheathe again. His first thought was that he must somehow make the people hear him. He lifted his hand and advanced a step; but as he did so a shot rang out, followed by a loud cry. The lieutenant of the light-horse, infuriated by the insult to his master, had drawn the pistol from his holster and fired blindly into the crowd. His bullet had found a mark, and the throng hissed and seethed about the spot where a man had fallen. At the same instant Odo was aware of a commotion in the group behind him, and with a great plunge of the heart he saw Fulvia at his side. She still wore the academic dress, and her black gown detached itself sharply against the bright colors of the ducal uniforms.

Groans and hisses received her, but the mob hung back, as though her look had checked them. Then a voice shrieked out: "Down with the atheist! We want no foreign witches!" and another caught it up with the yell: "She poisoned the weaver's boy! Her father was hanged for murdering Christian children!"

The cry set the crowd in motion again, and it rolled toward the line of mounted soldiers at the foot of the steps. The men had their hands on their holsters; but the Duke's call rang out: "No firing!" and drawing their blades, they sat motionless to receive the shock.

It came, dashed against them and dispersed them. Only a few yards lay now between the people and their

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sovereign. But at that moment another shot was fired. This time it came from the thick of the crowd. The equerries' swords leapt forth again, and they closed around the Duke and Fulvia.

"Save yourself, sir! Back into the building!" one of the gentlemen shouted; but Odo had no eyes for what was coming. For as the shot was heard he had seen a change in Fulvia. A moment they had stood together, smiling, undaunted, hands locked and wedded eyes; then he felt her dissolve against him and drop between his arms.

A cry had gone out that the Duke was wounded, and a leaden silence fell on the crowd. In that silence Odo knelt, lifting Fulvia's head to his breast. No wound showed through her black gown. She lay as though smitten by some invisible hand. So deep was the hush that her least whisper must have reached him; but though he bent close no whisper came. The invisible hand had struck the very source of life; and to these two, in their moment of final reunion, with so much unsaid between them that now at last they longed to say, there was left only the dumb communion of fast-clouding eyes. . .

A clatter of cavalry was heard down the streets that led to the square. The equerry sent to warn Fulvia had escaped from the back of the building and hastened to the barracks to summon a regiment. But the soldiery

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were no longer needed. The blind fury of the mob had died of its own excess. The rumor that the Duke was hurt brought a chill reaction of dismay, and the rioters were already scattering when the cavalry came in sight. Their approach turned the slow dispersal to a stampede. A few arrests were made, the remaining groups were charged by the soldiers, and presently the square lay bare as a storm-swept plain, though the people still hung on its outskirts, ready to disband at the first threat of the troops.

It was on this solitude that the Duke looked out as he regained a sense of his surroundings. Fulvia had been carried into the audience-chamber and laid on the dais, her head resting on the velvet cushions of the ducal chair. She had died instantly, shot through the heart, and the surgeons summoned in haste had soon ceased from their ineffectual efforts. For a long time Odo knelt beside her, unconscious of all but that one wild moment when life at its highest had been dashed into the gulf of death. Thought had ceased, and neither rage nor grief moved as yet across the chaos of his being. All his life was in his eyes, as they drew up, drop by drop, the precious essence of her loveliness. For she had grown, beneath the simplifying hand of death, strangely yet most humanly beautiful. Life had fallen from her like the husk from the flower, and she wore the face of her first hopes. The transition had been too swift for

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any backward look, any anguished rending of the fibres, and he felt himself, not detached by the stroke, but caught up with her into some great calm within the heart of change.

He knew not how he found himself once more on the steps above the square. Below him his state carriage stood in the same place, flanked by the regiment of cavalry. Down the narrow streets he saw the brooding cloud of people, and the sight roused his blood. They were his enemies now—he felt the warm hate in his veins. They were his enemies, and he would face them openly. No closed chariot guarded by troops—he would not have so much as a pane of glass between himself and his subjects. He descended the steps, bade the colonel of the regiment dismount, and sprang into his saddle. Then, at the head of his soldiers, at a foot-pace, he rode back through the packed streets to the palace.

In the palace, courtyard and vestibule were thronged with courtiers and lacqueys. He walked through them with his head high, the cut on his lip like the mark of a hot iron in the dead whiteness of his face. At the head of the great staircase Maria Clementina waited. She sprang forward, distraught and trembling, her face as blanched as his.

"You are safe—you are safe—you are not hurt—" she stammered, catching at his hands.

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A shudder seized him as he put her aside.

"Odo! Odo!" she cried passionately, and made as though to bar his way.

He gave her a blind look and passed on down the long gallery to his closet.

XI

THE joy of reprisals lasted no longer than a summer storm. To hurt, to silence, to destroy, was too easy to be satisfying. The passions of his ancestors burned low in Odo's breast: though he felt Braccia-forte's fury in his veins he could taste no answering gratification of revenge. And the spirit on which he would have spent his hatred was not here or there, as an embodied faction, but everywhere as an intangible influence. The *acqua tofana* of his enemies had pervaded every fibre of the state.

The mist of anguish lifted, he saw himself alone among ruins. For a moment Fulvia's glowing faith had hung between him and a final vision of the truth; and as his convictions weakened he had replaced them with an immense pity, an all-sufficing hope. Sentimental verbiage: he saw it clearly now. He had been the dupe of the old word-jugglery which was forever confounding fact and fancy in men's minds. For it was essentially an age of words: the world was drunk with them,

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as it had once been drunk with action; and the former was the deadlier drug of the two.

He looked about him languidly, letting the facts of life filter slowly through his faculties. The sources of energy were so benumbed in him that he felt like a man whom long disease has reduced to helplessness and who must laboriously begin his bodily education again. Hate was the only passion which survived, and that was but a deaf intransitive emotion coiled in his nature's depths.

Sickness at last brought its obliteration. He sank into gulfs of weakness and oblivion, and when the rise of the tide floated him back to life, it was to a life as faint and colorless as infancy. Colorless too were the boundaries on which he looked out: the narrow enclosure of white walls, opening on a slit of pale spring landscape. His hands lay before him, white and helpless on the white coverlet of his bed. He raised his eyes and saw de Crucis at his side. Then he began to remember. There had been preceding intervals of consciousness, and in one of them, in answer perhaps to some vaguely-uttered wish for light and air, he had been carried out of the palace and the city to the Benedictine monastery on its wooded knoll beyond the Piana. Then the veil had dropped again, and his spirit had wandered in a dim place of shades. There was a faint sweetness in coming back at last to familiar sights

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and sounds. They no longer hurt like pressure on an aching nerve: they seemed rather, now, the touch of a reassuring hand.

As the contact with life became closer and more sustained he began to watch himself curiously, wondering what instincts and habits of thought would survive his long mental death. It was with a bitter, almost pitiable disappointment that he found the old man growing again in him. Life, with a mocking hand, brought him the cast-off vesture of his past, and he felt himself gradually compressed again into the old passions and prejudices. Yet he wore them with a difference—they were a cramping garment rather than a living sheath. He had brought back from his lonely voyagings a sense of estrangement deeper than any surface-affinity with things.

As his physical strength returned, and he was able to leave his room and walk through the long corridors to the outer air, he felt the old spell which the life of Monte Cassino had cast on him. The quiet garden, with its clumps of box and lavender between paths converging to the statue of Saint Benedict; the cloisters paved with the monks' nameless graves; the traces of devotional painting left here and there on the weather-beaten walls, like fragments of prayer in a world-worn mind: these formed a circle of tranquillizing influences in which he could gradually reacquire the habit of living.

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He had never deceived himself as to the cause of the riots. He knew from Gamba and Andreoni that the liberals and the court, for once working in unison, had provoked the blind outburst of fanaticism which a rasher judgment might have ascribed to the clergy. The Dominicans, bigoted and eager for power, had been ready enough to serve such an end, and some of the begging orders had furnished the necessary points of contact with the people; but the movement was at bottom purely political, and represented the resistance of the privileged classes to any attack on their inherited rights.

As such, he could no longer regard it as completely unreasonable. He was beginning to feel the social and political significance of those old restrictions and barriers against which his early zeal had tilted. Certainly in the ideal state the rights and obligations of the different classes would be more evenly adjusted. But the ideal state was a figment of the brain. The real one, as Crescenti had long ago pointed out, was the gradual and heterogeneous product of remote social conditions, wherein every seeming inconsistency had its roots in some bygone need, and the character of each class, with its special passions, ignorances and prejudices, was the sum total of influences so ingrown and inveterate that they had become a law of thought. All this, however, seemed rather matter for philosophic musing than for

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definite action. His predominant feeling was still that of remoteness from the immediate issues of life: the *sæva indignatio* had been succeeded by a great calm.

The soothing influences of the monastic life had doubtless helped to tide him over the stormy passage of returning consciousness. His sensitiveness to these influences inclined him for the first time to consider them analytically. Hitherto he had regarded the Church as a skilfully-adjusted engine, the product of human passions scientifically combined to obtain the greatest sum of tangible results. Now he saw that he had never penetrated beneath the surface. For the Church which grasped, contrived, calculated, struggled for temporal possessions and used material weapons against spiritual foes—this outer Church was nothing more than the body, which, like any other animal body, had to care for its own gross needs, nourish, clothe, defend itself, fight for a footing among the material resistances of life—while the soul, the inner animating principle, might dwell aloof from all these things, in a clear medium of its own.

To this soul of the Church his daily life now brought him close. He felt it in the ordered beneficence of the great community, in the simplicity of its external life and the richness and suavity of its inner relations. No alliance based on material interests, no love of power working toward a common end, could have created

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that harmony of thought and act which was reflected in every face about him. Each of these men seemed to have *found out something* of which he was still ignorant.

What it was, de Crucis tried to tell him as they paced the cloisters together or sat in the warm stillness of the budding garden. At the first news of the Duke's illness the Jesuit had hastened to Pianura. No companionship could have been so satisfying to Odo. De Crucis's mental attitude toward mankind might have been defined as an illuminated charity. To love men, or to understand them, is not as unusual as to do both together; and it was the intellectual acuteness of his friend's judgments that made their Christian amenity so seductive to Odo.

"The highest claim of Christianity," the Jesuit said one morning, as they sat on a worn stone bench at the end of the sunny vine-walk, "is that it has come nearer to solving the problem of men's relations to each other than any system invented by themselves. This, after all, is the secret principle of the Church's vitality. She gave a spiritual charter of equality to mankind long before the philosophers thought of giving them a material one. If, all the while, she has been fighting for dominion, arrogating to herself special privileges, struggling to preserve the old lines of social and legal demarcation, it has been because for nigh two thousand years she has cherished in her breast the one free city

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of the spirit, because to guard its liberties she has had to defend and strengthen her own position. I do not ask you to consider whence comes this insight into the needs of man, this mysterious power over him; I ask you simply to confess them in their results. I am not of those who believe that God permits good to come to mankind through one channel only, and I doubt not that now and in times past the thinkers whom your Highness follows have done much to raise the condition of their fellows; but I would have you observe that, where they have done so, it has been because, at bottom, their aims coincided with the Church's. The deeper you probe into her secret sources of power, the more you find there, in the germ if you will, but still potentially active, all those humanizing energies which work together for the lifting of the race. In her wisdom and her patience she may have seen fit to withhold their expression, to let them seek another outlet; but they are there, stored in her consciousness like the archetypes of the Platonists in the Universal Mind. It is the knowledge of this, the sure knowledge of it, which creates the atmosphere of serenity that you feel about you. From the tilling of the vineyards, or the dressing of a beggar's sores, to the loftiest and most complicated intellectual labor imposed on him, each brother knows that his daily task is part of a great scheme of action, working ever from imperfection to perfection, from human

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incompleteness to the divine completion. This sense of being, not straws on a blind wind of chance, but units in an ordered force, gives to the humblest Christian an individual security and dignity which kings on their thrones might envy.

"But not only does the Church anticipate every tendency of mankind; alone of all powers she knows how to control and direct the passions she excites. This it is which makes her an auxiliary that no temporal prince can well despise. It is in this aspect that I would have your Highness consider her. Do not underrate her power because it seems based on the commoner instincts rather than on the higher faculties of man. That is one of the sources of her strength. She can support her claims by reason and argument, but it is because her work, like that of her divine Founder, lies chiefly among those who can neither reason nor argue, that she chooses to rest her appeal in the simplest and most universal emotions. As, in our towns, the streets are lit mainly by the tapers before the shrines of the saints, so the way of life would be dark to the great multitude of men but for the light of faith burning within them. . ."

Meanwhile the shufflings of destiny had brought to Trescorre the prize for which he waited. During the Duke's illness he had been appointed Regent of Pianura, and his sovereign's reluctance to take up the cares

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of government had now left him for six months in authority. The day after the proclaiming of the constitution Odo had withdrawn his signature from it, on the ground that the concessions it contained were inopportune. The functions of government went on again in the old way. The old abuses persisted, the old offences were condoned: it was as though the apathy of the sovereign had been communicated to his people. Centuries of submission were in their blood, and for two generations there had been no warfare south of the Alps.

For the moment men's minds were turned to the great events going forward in France. It had not yet occurred to the Italians that the recoil of these events might be felt among themselves. They were simply amused spectators, roused at last to the significance of the show, but never dreaming that they might soon be called from the wings to the footlights. To de Crucis, however, the possibility of such a call was already present, and it was he who pressed the Duke to return to his post. A deep reluctance held Odo back. He would have liked to linger on in the monastery, leading the tranquil yet busy life of the monks, and trying to read the baffling riddle of its completeness. At that moment it seemed to him of vastly more importance to discover the exact nature of the soul—whether it was in fact a metaphysical entity, as these men believed, or a mere secretion of the brain, as he had been taught to think

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—than to go back and govern his people. For what mattered the rest, if he had been mistaken about the soul?

With a start he realized that he was going as his cousin had gone—that this was but another form of the fatal lethargy that hung upon his race. An effort of the will drew him back to Pianura, and made him resume the semblance of authority; but it carried him no farther. Trescorre ostensibly became prime-minister, and in reality remained the head of the state. The Duke was present at the cabinet meetings but took no part in the direction of affairs. His mind was lost in a maze of metaphysical speculations; and even these served him merely as some cunningly-contrived toy with which to trick his leisure.

His revocation of the charter had necessarily separated him from Gamba and the advanced liberals. He knew that the hunchback, ever scornful of expediency, charged him with disloyalty to the people; but such charges could no longer wound. The events following the Duke's birthday had served to crystallize the schemes of the little liberal group, and they now formed a campaign of active opposition to the government, attacking it by means of pamphlets and lampoons, and by such public speaking as the police allowed. The new professors of the University, ardently in sympathy with the constitutional movement, used their lectures as means

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of political teaching, and the old stronghold of dogma became the centre of destructive criticism. But as yet these ideas formed but a single live point in the general numbness.

Two years passed in this way. North of the Alps, all Europe was convulsed, while Italy was still but a sleeper who tosses in his sleep. In the two Sicilies, the arrogance and perfidy of the government gave a few martyrs to the cause, and in Bologna there was a brief revolutionary outbreak; but for the most part the Italian states were sinking into inanition. Venice, by recalling her fleet from Greece, let fall the dominion of the sea. Twenty years earlier Genoa had basely yielded Corsica to France. The Pope condemned the French for their outrages on religion, and his subjects murdered Basseville, the agent of the new republic. The sympathies and impulses of the various states were as contradictory as they were ineffectual.

Meanwhile, in France, Europe was trying to solve at a stroke the problems of a thousand years. All the repressed passions which civilization had sought, however imperfectly, to curb, stalked abroad destructive as flood and fire. The great generation of the Encyclopædists had passed away, and the teachings of Rousseau had prevailed over those of Montesquieu and Voltaire. The sober sense of the economists was swept aside by

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the sound and fury of the demagogues, and France was become a very Babel of tongues. The old malady of words had swept over the world like a pestilence.

To the little Italian courts, still dozing in fancied security under the wing of Bourbon and Hapsburg suzerains, these rumors were borne by the wild flight of *émigrés*—dead leaves loosened by the first blast of the storm. Month by month they poured across the Alps in ever-increasing numbers, bringing confused contradictory tales of anarchy and outrage. Among those whom chance thus carried to Pianura were certain familiars of the Duke's earlier life—the Count Alfieri and his royal mistress, flying from Paris, and arriving breathless with the tale of their private injuries. To the poet of revolt this sudden realization of his doctrines seemed in fact a purely personal outrage. It was as though a man writing an epic poem on an earthquake should suddenly find himself engulphed. To Alfieri the downfall of the French monarchy and the triumph of democratic ideas meant simply that his French investments had shrunk to nothing, and that he, the greatest poet of the age, had been obliged, at an immense sacrifice of personal dignity, to plead with a drunken mob for leave to escape from Paris. To the wider aspect of the "tragic farce," as he called it, his eyes remained obstinately closed. He viewed the whole revolutionary movement as a conspiracy against his comfort, and boasted that

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during his enforced residence in France he had not so much as exchanged a word with one of the "French slaves, instigators of false liberty," who, by trying to put into action the principles taught in his previous works, had so grievously interfered with the composition of fresh masterpieces.

The royal pretensions of the Countess of Albany—pretensions affirmed rather than abated as the tide of revolution rose—made it impossible that she should be received at the court of Pianura; but the Duke found a mild entertainment in Alfieri's company. The poet's revulsion of feeling seemed to Odo like the ironic laughter of the fates. His thoughts returned to the midnight meetings of the Honey Bees, and to the first vision of that face which men had laid down their lives to see. Men had looked on that face since then, and its horror was reflected in their own.

Other fugitives to Pianura brought another impression of events—that comic note which life, the supreme dramatic artist, never omits from her tragedies. These were the Duke's old friend the Marquis de Cœur-Volant, fleeing from his château as the peasants put the torch to it, and arriving in Pianura destitute, gouty and middle-aged, but imperturbable and epigrammatic as ever. With him came his Marquise, a dark-eyed lady, stout to unwieldiness and much given to devotion, in whom it was whispered (though he introduced her as

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during his enforced residence in France he had not so much as exchanged a word with one of the "French slaves, instigators of false liberty," who, by trying to put into action the principles taught in his previous works, had so grievously interfered with the composition of fresh masterpieces.

The royal pretensions of the Countess of Albany—pretensions affirmed rather than abated as the tide of revolution rose—made it impossible that she should be received at the court of Pianura; but the Duke found a mild entertainment in Alfieri's company. The poet's revulsion of feeling seemed to Odo like the ironic laughter of the fates. His thoughts returned to the midnight meetings of the Honey Bees, and to the first vision of that face which men had laid down their lives to see. Men had looked on that face since then, and its horror was reflected in their own.

Other fugitives to Pianura brought another impression of events—that comic note which life, the supreme dramatic artist, never omits from her tragedies. These were the Duke's old friend the Marquis de Cœur-Volant, fleeing from his château as the peasants put the torch to it, and arriving in Pianura destitute, gouty and middle-aged, but imperturbable and epigrammatic as ever. With him came his Marquise, a dark-eyed lady, stout to unwieldiness and much given to devotion, in whom it was whispered (though he introduced her as

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the daughter of a Venetian Senator) that a reminiscent eye might still detect the outline of the gracefullest Columbine who had ever flitted across the Italian stage. These visitors were lodged by the Duke's kindness in the Palazzo Cerveno, near the ducal residence; and though the ladies of Pianura were inclined to look askance on the Marquise's genealogy, yet his Highness's condescension, and her own edifying piety, had soon allayed these scruples, and the salon of Madame de Cœur-Volant became the rival of Madame d'Albany's.

It was, in fact, the more entertaining of the two; for, in spite of his lady's austere views, the Marquis retained that gift of social flexibility that was already becoming the tradition of a happier day. To the Marquis, indeed, the revolution was execrable not so much because of the hardships it inflicted, as because it was the forerunner of social dissolution—the breaking-up of the régime which had made manners the highest morality, and conversation the chief end of man. He could have lived gaily on a crust in good company and amid smiling faces; but the social deficiencies of Pianura were more difficult to endure than any material privation. In Italy, as the Marquis had more than once remarked, people loved, gambled, wrote poetry, and patronized the arts; but, alas, they did not converse. Cœur-Volant could not conceal from his Highness that there was no conversation in Pianura; but he did his best to fill the void by

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the constant exercise of his own gift in that direction, and to Odo at least his talk seemed as good as it was copious. Misfortune had given a finer savor to the Marquis's philosophy, and there was a kind of heroic grace in his undisturbed cultivation of the amenities.

While the Marquis was struggling to preserve the conversational art, and Alfieri planning the savage revenge of the Misogallo, the course of affairs in France had gained a wilder impetus. The abolition of the nobility, the flight and capture of the King, his enforced declaration of war against Austria, the massacres of Avignon, the sack of the Tuileries—such events seemed incredible enough till the next had crowded them out of mind. The new year rose in blood and mounted to a bloodier noon. All the old defences were falling. Religion, monarchy, law, were sucked down into the whirlpool of liberated passions. Across that sanguinary scene passed, like a mocking ghost, the philosophers' vision of the perfectibility of man. Man was free at last—freer than his would-be liberators had ever dreamed of making him—and he used his freedom like a beast. For the multitude had risen—that multitude which no man could number, which even the demagogues who ranted in its name had never seriously reckoned with—that dim grovelling indistinguishable mass on which the whole social structure rested. It was as though the very soil moved, rising in mountains or yawning in chasms about

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the feet of those who had so long securely battened on it. The earth shook, the sun and moon were darkened, and the people, the terrible unknown people, had put in the sickle to the harvest.

Italy roused herself at last. The emissaries of the new France were swarming across the Alps, pervading the peninsula as the Jesuits had once pervaded Europe; and in the mind of a young general of the republican army visions of Italian conquest were already forming. In Pianura the revolutionary agents found a strong republican party headed by Gamba and his friends, and a government weakened by debt and dissensions. The air was thick with intrigue. The little army could no longer be counted on, and a prolonged bread-riot had driven Trescorre out of the ministry and compelled the Duke to appoint Andreoni in his place. Behind Andreoni stood Gamba and the radicals. There could be no doubt which way the fortunes of the duchy tended. The Duke's would-be protectors, Austria and the Holy See, were too busy organizing the hasty coalition of the powers to come to his aid, had he cared to call on them. But to do so would have been but another way of annihilation. To preserve the individuality of his state, or to merge it in the vision of a United Italy, seemed to him the only alternatives worth fighting for. The former was a futile dream, the latter seemed for a brief moment possible. Piedmont, ever loyal to the

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monarchical principle, was calling on her sister states to arm themselves against the French invasion. But the response was reluctant and uncertain. Private ambitions and petty jealousies hampered every attempt at union. Austria, the Bourbons and the Holy See held the Italian principalities in a network of conflicting interests and obligations that rendered free action impossible. Sadly Victor Amadeus armed himself alone against the enemy.

Under such conditions Odo could do little to direct the course of events. They had passed into more powerful hands than his. But he could at least declare himself for or against the mighty impulse which was behind them. The ideas he had striven for had triumphed at last, and his surest hold on authority was to share openly in their triumph. A profound horror dragged him back. The new principles were not those for which he had striven. The goddess of the new worship was but a bloody Mænad who had borrowed the attributes of freedom. He could not bow the knee in such a charnel-house. Tranquilly, resolutely, he took up the policy of repression. He knew the attempt was foredoomed to failure, but that made no difference now: he was simply acting out the inevitable.

The last act came with unexpected suddenness. The Duke woke one morning to find the citadel in the possession of the people. The impregnable stronghold of Bracciaforte was in the hands of the serfs whose fathers

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had toiled to build it, and the last descendant of Bracciaforte was virtually a prisoner in his palace. The revolution took place quietly, without violence or bloodshed. Andreoni waited on the Duke, and a cabinet-council was summoned. The ministers affected to have yielded reluctantly to popular pressure. All they asked was a constitution and the assurance that no resistance would be offered to the French.

The Duke requested a few hours for deliberation. Left alone, he summoned the Duchess's chamberlain. The ducal pair no longer met save on occasions of state: they had not exchanged a word since the death of Fulvia Vivaldi. Odo sent word to her Highness that he could no longer answer for her security while she remained in the duchy, and that he begged her to leave immediately for Vienna. She replied that she was obliged for his warning, but that while he remained in Pianura her place was at his side. It was the answer he had expected—he had never doubted her courage—but it was essential to his course that she should leave the duchy without delay, and after a moment's reflection he wrote a letter in which he informed her that he must insist on her obedience. No answer was returned, but he learned that she had turned white, and tearing the letter in shreds had called for her travelling-carriage within the hour. He sent to enquire when he might take leave of her, but she excused herself on the

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plea of indisposition, and before nightfall he heard the departing rattle of her wheels.

He immediately summoned Andreoni and announced his unconditional refusal of the terms proposed to him. He would not give a constitution or promise allegiance to the French. The minister withdrew, and Odo was left alone. He had dismissed his gentlemen, and as he sat in his closet a sense of deathlike isolation came over him. Never had the palace seemed so silent or so vast. He had not a friend to turn to. De Crucis was in Germany, and Trescorre, it was reported, had privately attended the Duchess in her flight. The waves of destiny seemed closing over Odo, and the circumstances of his past rose, poignant and vivid, before his drowning sight.

And suddenly, in that moment of failure and abandonment, it seemed to him again that life was worth the living. His indifference fell from him like a garment. The old passion of action awoke and he felt a new warmth in his breast. After all, the struggle was not yet over: though Piedmont had called in vain on the Italian states, an Italian sword might still be drawn in her service. If his people would not follow him against France he could still march against her alone. Old memories hummed in him at the thought. He recalled how his Piedmontese ancestors had gone forth against the same foe, and the stout Donnaz blood began to bubble in his veins.

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A knock roused him and Gamba entered by the private way. His appearance was not unexpected to Odo, and served only to reinforce his new-found energy. He felt that the issue was at hand. As he expected, Gamba had been sent to put before him more forcibly and unceremoniously the veiled threat of the ministers. But the hunchback had come also to plead with his master in his own name, and in the name of the ideas for which they had once labored together. He could not believe that the Duke's reaction was more than momentary. He could not calculate the strength of the old associations which, now that the tide had set the other way, were dragging Odo back to the beliefs and traditions of his caste.

The Duke listened in silence; then he said: "Discussion is idle. I have no answer to give but that which I have already given." He rose from his seat in token of dismissal.

The moment was painful to both men. Gamba drew nearer and fell at the Duke's feet.

"Your Highness," he said, "consider what this means. We hold the state in our hands. If you are against us you are powerless. If you are with us we can promise you more power than you ever dreamed of possessing."

The Duke looked at him with a musing smile. "It is as though you offered me gold in a desert island," he said. "Do not waste such poor bribes on me. I care for

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no power but the power to wipe out the work of these last years. Failing that, I want nothing that you or any other man can give."

Gamba was silent a moment. He turned aside into the embrasure of the window, and when he spoke again it was in a voice broken with grief.

"Your Highness," he said, "if your choice is made, ours is made also. It is a hard choice, but these are fratricidal hours. We have come to the parting of the ways."

The Duke made no sign, and Gamba went on, with gathering anguish: "We could have gone to the world's end with your Highness for our leader!"

"With a leader whom you could lead," Odo interposed. He went up to Gamba and laid a hand on his shoulder. "Speak out, man," he said. "Say what you were sent to say. Am I a prisoner?"

The hunchback burst into tears. Odo, with his arms crossed, stood leaning against the window. The other's anguish seemed to deepen his detachment.

"Your Highness—your Highness—" Gamba stammered.

The Duke made an impatient gesture. "Come, make an end," he said.

Gamba fell back with a profound bow.

"We do not ask the surrender of your Highness's person," he said.

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"Not even that?" Odo returned with a faint sneer.

Gamba flushed to the temples, but the retort died on his lips.

"Your Highness," he said, scarce above a whisper, "the gates are guarded; but the word for to-night is *Humilitas*." He knelt and kissed Odo's hand. Then he rose and passed out of the room. . .

. . . . . .

Before dawn the Duke left the palace. The high emotions of the night had ebbed. He saw himself now, in the ironic light of morning, as a fugitive too harmless to be worth pursuing. His enemies had let him keep his sword because they had no cause to fear it. Alone he passed through the gardens of the palace, and out into the desert darkness of the streets. Skirting the wall of the Benedictine convent where Fulvia had lodged, he gained a street leading to the market-place. In the pallor of the waning night the ancient monuments of his race stood up mournful and deserted as a line of tombs. The city seemed a grave-yard and he the ineffectual ghost of its dead past. He reached the gates and gave the watchword. The gates were guarded, as he had been advised; but the captain of the watch let him pass without show of hesitation or curiosity. Though he had made no effort at disguise he went forth unrecognized, and the city closed her doors on him as carelessly as on any passing wanderer.

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Beyond the gates a lad from the ducal stables waited with a horse. Odo sprang into the saddle and rode on toward Pontesordo. The darkness was growing thinner, and the meagre details of the landscape, with its huddled farm-houses and mulberry-orchards, began to define themselves as he advanced. To his left the fields stretched, grey and sodden; ahead, on his right, hung the dark woods of the ducal chase. Presently a bend of the road brought him within sight of the keep of Pontesordo. His way led past it, toward Valsecca; but some obscure instinct laid a detaining hand on him, and at the cross-roads he bent to the right and rode across the marshland to the old manor-house.

The farm-yard lay hushed and deserted. The peasants who lived there would soon be afoot; but for the moment Odo had the place to himself. He tethered his horse to a gate-post and walked across the rough cobble-stones to the chapel. Its floor was still heaped with farm-tools and dried vegetables, and in the dimness a heavier veil of dust seemed to obscure the painted walls. Odo advanced, picking his way among broken ploughshares and stacks of maize, till he stood near the old marble altar, with its sea-gods and acanthus volutes. The place laid its tranquillizing hush on him, and he knelt on the step beneath the altar. Something stirred in him as he knelt there—a prayer, yet not a prayer—a reaching out, obscure and inarticulate, toward all that

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had survived of his early hopes and faiths, a loosening of old founts of pity, a longing to be somehow, somewhere reunited to his old belief in life.

How long he knelt he knew not; but when he looked up the chapel was full of a pale light, and in the first shaft of the sunrise the face of Saint Francis shone out on him. . . He went forth into the daybreak and rode away toward Piedmont.

THE END

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